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Twenty Miles to Rome: the Story of South Carolina's First Medal of Honor Winner in World War II

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TWENTY MILES TO ROME: THE STORY OF SOUTH CAROLINA'S FIRST
MEDAL OF HONOR WINNER IN WORLD WAR II

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
History

by
Charles Daniel Taylor
August 2009

Accepted by:
Dr. Rod Andrew, Committee Chair
Dr. Alan Grubb
Dr. Roger Grant

ABSTRACT

This thesis, which has encompassed my life for the last several months, began as sort of an afterthought. A graduate course that I was taking in fall 2008 required the students to produce a prospectus for a new biography that should be added to the historical record. Looking to find a subject that I did not mind researching, I chose to write a proposal on my great uncle Furman L. Smith, who was South Carolina's first Congressional Medal of Honor winner in World War II. I had always had an interest in family history, but felt guilty that I knew relatively little about a relative who had achieved the nation's highest military honor.

After researching, I discovered I was not alone in my ignorance. People had nothing but good things to say about Uncle Furman; he was remembered as a brave soldier, hardworking son, and honest individual. Yet despite this praise, few people could tell me what he actually did in the war. A handful knew the basics of what Furman did to receive his Medal of Honor, but a greater number of people had misconceptions about his glorious feat. Furman was remembered fondly by many people, but ironically, few knew many details about his military experience.

This gap in information for someone who seemingly made such an impression on everyone made me realize that Furman deserved more than a passing project in a graduate course. I found myself in a unique position, being in possession of a number of documents that have since been lost in a fire at the National Archives. With people from his generation passing every day, I felt obligated to tell Furman's tale before it is lost.

Thus, I have made Furman the subject of my thesis in hopes of providing an accurate narrative for future generations.

In my thesis, I hope to address several military questions that I had about Furman the soldier. What was his entire military experience like? What specifically did he do to earn the Medal of Honor? How did his experience fit into the larger picture of the war? Yet I also had personal questions about Furman the farmboy. What in his background caused him to take his heroic actions? What kind of person was he? What were his concerns on the battlefield? And finally, how did his feat impact his family in following generations?

Portrayed in the first chapter is a detailed account of Furman's military experience, along with how his actions fit into the campaign as a whole. In the second chapter, I address Furman's family background and his younger years to discover what made him into the soldier he became. In the concluding chapters, I address Furman's Medal of Honor feat and how it has affected his family after World War II.

My hope is to give Furman's story justice for it truly is a great one.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all World War II veterans, especially those from the 34th Red Bull Division.

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CHAPTER ONE

HEAVY-HEARTED HERO: FURMAN L. SMITH

AND THE BREAKOUT FROM ANZIO, 1944

“I am in combat...don’t you tell Ma,” Private Furman Smith wrote to his big brother Homer in what would be his last letter home.¹ The young soldier would no longer have time to write, as he was about to participate in the great Allied offensive to free Rome from Nazi Germany. That glorious feat would be accomplished in just ten days, but Furman’s military service would be over after eight.

Until his entry into the United States Army, Furman had never spent a night away from his home in the Piedmont of upstate South Carolina. Growing up without a radio on his family’s farm, Furman had little knowledge of global events. For 18 years, his world had been a small one. The small town of Six Mile, where his family sold their cotton, was only two miles down the road. King’s Grove Baptist Church, the social center of his community, was a mile in the other direction. He was 19 years of age, but Furman knew little about life outside of this three-mile stretch on Six Mile Creek. Yet ironically, this farmboy, who had spent 18 years isolated in a rural corner of South Carolina, was destined to become a extraordinary soldier in the greatest war in world history.

Despite his youth and naivety, Furman was used to carrying weight on his shoulders. Before he was a teenager, his father became disabled and unable to plow the family’s 57-acre farm. His older brother Homer had already married, leaving the 12-

¹ Furman Smith, “Letter to Homer Smith,” 24 May 1944, copy obtained from Nancy McJunkin, Taylor Family Archives: Central, S.C. (these documents are in personal possession of the author).

year-old Furman as the household's oldest able-bodied male. In response to his father's disability, Furman and his 10-year-old brother Mit dropped out of school to support their parents and five sisters.² Barely an adolescent, Furman suddenly became the acting caretaker of the family farm. This decision was not made because Furman was not fond of school; he had been an excellent student and a favorite of his teachers. Yet when his family needed him, Furman became the provider. Many other young boys from the Six Mile community put hard labor into their family farms. Edward Jewel recalled that he began plowing as soon as he was tall enough to reach the handles.³ However, Furman's situation where education had to be completely abandoned was hardly ideal. Despite this lost opportunity, Furman accepted his role without complaint.

Although he had graciously handled the burden of working the family farm, once away from his parents and seven siblings, Furman became an emotional wreck. During basic training at Fort McClellan in Alabama, he would often break down and cry.⁴ The young man, who had taken on the burden of provider without protest, ironically broke into tears when he answered his nation's call of duty. This peculiar reaction was not due to the hard work that military service required; many hardships had affected Furman throughout his lifetime. Born on May 11, 1925, Furman had grown up during the Great Depression. Around the same time, nearby Jones (corn) Mill had washed away during a flood. His father had been working there as a miller, and its destruction meant the loss of the highly desired income it provided. In 1936, the U.S. government had bought the

² Eleanor Smith, phone interview, 10 December 2008.

³ Edward Jewel, phone interview, 30 May 2009.

⁴ Leighton McKeithen, "Letter to Myra Taylor," 17 October 1988, Taylor Family Archives.

Smiths' farm to make way for a bombing range, which made them landless for the first time in 50 years. His father would eventually move the family onto part of his father-in-law's land, where Furman and his brother Mit would become the head plowmen.

Even the risk of life that the military required was nothing new for the Smiths; Furman had heard tales of tragic family deaths his entire life. His grandfather Oliver Smith had accidentally shot himself in 1909 while chasing a hawk when he tripped over a log. Furman's parents had lost their first child Eula Belle to the Influenza Epidemic of 1918. His uncle Rueben Smith had committed suicide on Valentine's Day in 1937.⁵ Therefore, the Smiths were no strangers to tragedy. It would seem that a young man so accustomed to hardship would not have become an emotional wreck after entering service. Yet through all the difficulty in his life, his family had been there with him. When Furman was drafted, he would have to face adversity alone for the first time.

During one of his emotional outbreaks at basic training, Furman was sobbing on the back steps of the barracks when a passing colonel overheard his cries.⁶ The colonel asked, "Soldier, what's wrong with you?" With tears in his eyes, Furman replied, "Sir, I'm homesick." The annoyed colonel quickly responded, "Don't you know how to act when you're away from home?" Then the emotional soldier gave an honest, heart-felt reply, "Sir, being away from home is why I'm homesick."⁷ Apparently moved by the young man's argument, the colonel told Furman's captain to grant him a three-day furlough to go back home.

⁵ Information on deaths comes from family stories and death certificates in the Taylor Family Archives.

⁶ Leighton McKeithen, phone interview, 28 December 2008.

⁷ Ibid.

While the colonel's decision to let a soldier go in the middle of World War II could appear ill-advised, the colonel explained to Furman's captain that he did not seem like the type that would go AWOL (absent without leave).⁸ Regardless, even if Furman never returned, a soldier in his emotional state would have been practically useless in warfare. His depression could seriously hinder his fighting spirit as well as dampen the moral of other soldiers. The colonel likely granted the furlough on a chance that Furman would straighten himself out. It seemed a slim possibility at the time, but with more composure, Furman could turn out to be a decent soldier. After all, a furlough had worked for World War I hero Alvin York.

Furman's family was well known and cherished in their small hometown of Six Mile. "They were the finest family in the country," declared their long-time neighbor Mary Ann Hendricks.⁹ Furman's father Charlie led a pious household, whose Sunday night prayer meetings were so emphatic that neighbors could hear them praising the Lord for a mile. Charlie was an active member at King's Grove Baptist Church who sat in the amen corner and often gave testimony.¹⁰ The Smiths were not wealthy, but took great care of the possessions they had. Their horses always had clean shoes, and their wagon was always well-oiled.¹¹ People could observe the pride the family had as they made trips into Six Mile. Grouped together on a two-horse wagon, the Smith children were impressively behaved. Six Mile resident Leroy Stewart recalled that when they came into

⁸ Leighton McKeithen, "Letter to Myra Taylor," 17 October 1988, Taylor Family Archives.

⁹ Mary Ann Hendricks, phone interview, 30 May 2009.

¹⁰ David Hendricks, phone interview, 24 December 2008.

¹¹ Leroy Stewart, personal interview, 29 January 2009.

town, one could tell, “Here comes a proud family.”¹² Pious, hardworking, and sober, the Smiths were highly respected in the community. When Furman was drafted, the Smiths were not alone in their concern as the entire community felt as if one of their sons had gone off to war.

Furman longed for an opportunity to see his friends and family again, but there was a more prominent reason for his grief at Fort McClellan; he had left a girl back home in South Carolina. Coming from a religious family herself, Aleen Rampey first met Furman during a prayer meeting led by her father, Reverend Grayden Rampey. The auburn-haired girl shared Furman’s sense of humor. Although he was rather reserved, the outgoing Aleen brought Furman out of his shell. Around his girlfriend, Furman appeared to be an extremely talkative lad who loved to laugh.¹³ The quiet Furman and outgoing Aleen complemented each other and made a lovely young couple. She was just 14 when they first met, but Aleen’s first cousin Alice Callahan could see that she was truly in love with Furman.¹⁴ Similarly, Furman felt strongly for Aleen, perhaps more than he had realized after their short relationship. When basic training tore him away from this young auburn-haired girl, Furman sank to an almost embarrassing low.

During the three-day furlough, Furman used the opportunity to say goodbye to his loved ones. He did so with sincerity as he realized that this could be his final goodbye. His oldest sister Essie Mae recalled his parting words to her, “If I don’t make it home,

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ray Herron, personal interview, 27 December 2008.

¹⁴ Alice Callahan, personal interview, 16 March 2009.

meet me in heaven.”¹⁵ These were touching words for his family, but Furman was desperate to see Aleen again. Leighton McKeithen, who was in basic training with Furman, remembered that he used to talk about his girlfriend constantly.¹⁶ A family story revealed that Furman was eager to tell his girlfriend something that he did not want anyone else to hear.¹⁷ He had something he wanted to tell Aleen, and it was killing him inside. It is not known exactly what the young soldier said to his girlfriend during the furlough, but her first cousin and close friend Alice Callahan believes Furman proposed to Aleen during his three-day furlough.¹⁸ Shortly thereafter, the couple considered themselves engaged.

Fellow soldier Leighton McKeithen recalled that Furman returned to basic training a changed man. He never cried and never complained; he was focused and ready for war.¹⁹ Perhaps, in the rush of being drafted, the thought of being pulled from his beloved world had not set in. Not until he was two states away in Alabama did Furman realize his situation. In his mind, he had not properly bid farewell to his parents, siblings, and the community which had been his life for 18 years. More seriously, he had left this beautiful girl without some indication that he was eager to come back to her. Furman’s furlough gave him what he thought was a lost opportunity—to say a proper goodbye and to propose to Aleen. He could now hope to return home as a hero to his family, and to his community, but above all else—to his girl.

¹⁵ Jim Clark, “Meet Me in Heaven,” *Red, White, and Blue*, supplement to the *Pickens Sentinel*. 2 July 1980, page 1.

¹⁶ McKeithen, “Letter to Myra Taylor.”

¹⁷ Lola Faye Lusk, phone interview, 22 February 2009.

¹⁸ Alice Callahan, phone interview, 15 December 2008.

¹⁹ McKeithen, phone interview, 30 December 2008.

While the furlough had a profound effect on Furman, his fellow soldiers never missed an opportunity to tease him about it. When walking alongside him, his fellow soldiers would pretend to cry in hopes of getting a trip home.²⁰ Furman took these gags from his newfound buddies in stride. They meant no harm, and they knew Furman for his sense of humor. The humble farmboy had grown on all the soldiers even before his furlough. He wrote home after just a few days in the army, “The people seem to think a right smart of me, and I think lots of them.”²¹ Their quick bond was not surprising. Good-natured, modest, and dependable, Furman was likable. His mother noted, “Furman just naturally loved people.”²² His clean-shaven face gave him a youthful appearance that made him seem approachable. He also had a simple smile that made him look honest, easy-going, and friendly. His pleasant facial features reflected his warm, caring personality.

²⁰ McKeithen, “Letter to Myra Taylor.”

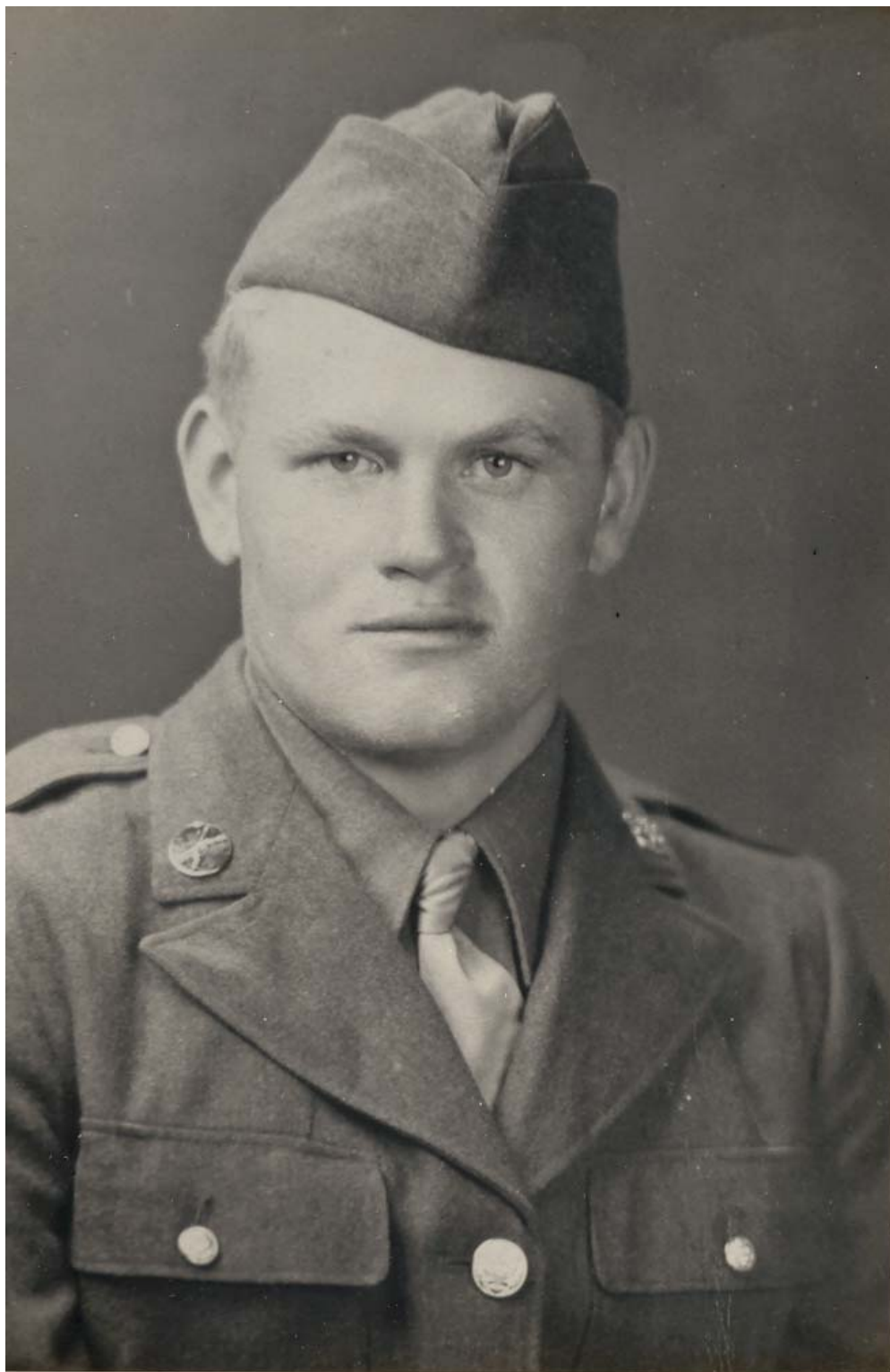
²¹ Furman Smith, “Letter to Mother, Dad, and all,” 22 Aug 1943, copy obtained from Grace Headen, Taylor Family Archives.

²² Oley Smith, quoted by Harlan Edwards.



Furman in Six Mile on a furlough, 1943

However, Furman also had the ability to look strikingly different from the likable farmboy that he was. In his army portrait, Furman revealed a serious demeanor that looked nothing like the warm, good-natured person that everyone knew. To anyone who views this photograph—a serious, determined face stares back. His rounded cheeks are less apparent; his sense of humor remains unseen. His face evokes determination, resiliency, and even ferocity. No weakness emits from his piercing (blue) eyes. It was a rarely seen, stern side of Furman, but one he was certainly capable of exposing.



Furman L. Smith, 1943

By the time of his deployment in January 1944, it was clear Furman had transformed from the homesick farmboy who had entered the service. Yet while on route to the Eastern Theatre, Furman still revealed some lingering sorrows to hometown friend Private Lloyd Hendricks, who was also onboard. Stacked together like sardines in bunks six-soldiers high, Furman had time to reflect on his young life. He now had comfort that the auburn-haired Aleen would be anxiously waiting for his return, but Furman had a sinking feeling that he would not be coming back. Furman ominously stated to his companion since childhood, “This is a one-way trip.”²³ One last time, tears briefly fell from the soldier’s blue eyes.

Furman’s realization that death was a distinct possibility touched Lloyd’s heart. “I’ll never forget what he said...Oh my, oh my, anytime one of your best friends says something like that it has a great effect on you,” said Lloyd in a 2009 interview.²⁴ The two young soldiers from Six Mile would continue across the Atlantic together and eventually end up at one of the most deadly areas of the war. By March, not only was Furman 4,000 miles away from his loved ones, but he was in the middle of “one of the most dangerous places on Earth”—Anzio.²⁵

Anzio: the Plan

The Allies intended for Anzio to be a brilliant Allied victory in January 1944. The war in Italy had started with the invasion of Sicily in June 1943, a month before

²³ Lloyd Hendricks, personal interview, 8 June 2009.

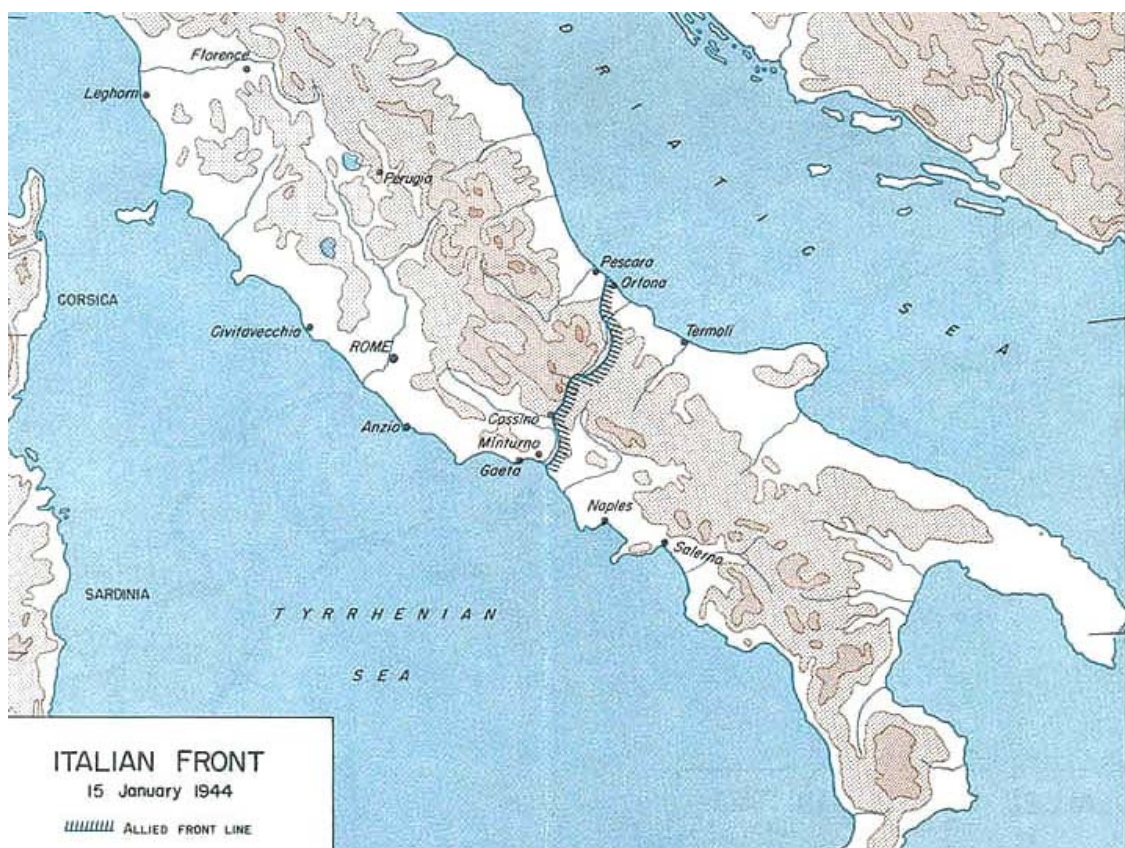
²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Lloyd Clark, *Anzio: Italy & Battle for Rome*. (New York: Grove Press, 2006), 234.

Furman was drafted. Combined American, British, and French forces had made headway on the peninsula, but at the cost of thousands of lives over the course of 10 months. By the beginning of 1944, the Germans had halted the Allied advance at the Gustav Line, less than 100 miles from Rome. With stiff resistance from the Germans, the Italian Campaign was proving costly for the Allies. The British and Americans had advantages in air support, naval strength, and supply capabilities; however, the narrow Italian peninsula, only 80 miles across at its widest point, allowed the German commander Albert Kesselring to concentrate his forces. Kesselring was a brilliant defensive general, and the country's mountainous terrain further assisted in thwarting the Allied advance. Despite numerous Allied advantages, the campaign appeared to be at a stalemate.

In response to the deadlock, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill supported a plan dubbed Operation Shingle. The proposal called for an amphibious landing at Anzio to create a separate invasion of Italy, north of the Germans' Gustav Line. This new assault would surprise the Germans and force General Kesselring to pull troops from his formidable Gustav Line in order to address the invasion. With the Gustav Line depleted, Churchill believed that the Allies could then drive the Germans back and proceed to Rome.²⁶ After so much frustration in the war, Allied commanders hoped Anzio would open the road to the Italian capital and shift the campaign in their favor.

²⁶ Rick Atkinson, *The Day of Battle: the War in Sicily & Italy, 1943-1944* (New York: Henry Holt, 2007), 322-28.



The German's Gustav Line, a hundred miles short of Rome ²⁷

Initially, the Allies took the Germans by complete surprise. As Furman was crossing the Atlantic, the invasion commenced on January 22, 1944 and faced no German resistance. However, the invasion commander, General John Lucas, felt his force was too small to hold any significant territory against a German counterattack. Rather than risk losing his two divisions, General Lucas secured the beachhead and made defensive preparations, instead of advancing on Rome. As General Lucas remained on the beachhead and the Germans responded to the invasion, higher command realized Anzio would not become the stunning victory they had hoped.

²⁷ Map is from *The Anzio Landing*, U.S. Army History, available online, <http://www.history.army.mil/books/wwii/anziobeach/anzio-landing.htm>.

While General Lucas failed to achieve the aggressive objectives of the Anzio invasion, he prevented the overextension of his two divisions and ensured a steady supply line to the beachhead. Under normal circumstances, the encircled troops at Anzio would have had to surrender, but the Allied naval operations kept the troops sustained. Due to the efforts of U.S. ships, the men at Anzio were never short of food, medical supplies, or ammunition.²⁸

Despite preventing total annihilation, General Lucas suffered criticism for his lead-footed approach. “I had hoped we were hurling a wildcat on the shore,” Winston Churchill complained, “but all we got was a stranded whale.”²⁹ Because of Anzio’s failure, higher commander replaced General Lucas in favor of another American general, Lucian Truscott. Despite General Lucas taking much of the initial blame, many scholars have argued that Anzio was simply a bad plan and doomed from the beginning. Historian Martin Blumenson summarized, “From a sane military viewpoint, Anzio was impractical. Only an amateur would have pushed for its execution.”³⁰ Tactically, Anzio resembled Churchill’s plan of Gallipoli in World War I. Both were bold, but ultimately resulted in failure.

²⁸ Martin Blumenson, *Anzio: the Gamble that Failed* (New York: B. Lippincott Company, 1963), 166-67.

²⁹ Ward B. Chamberlain, “Churchill and the Italian Campaign,” 3 Nov 1991, available online: the Churchill Centre, <http://www.winstonchurchill.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=597>.

³⁰ Blumenson., 200.

Stalemate, March 17-May 22, 1944

Regardless of fault, Anzio became another stalemate in Italy. The Allies were fighting on two fronts, at the Anzio beachhead and against the Gustav Line to the south. The distance between the two areas prevented either line from supporting the other.

Of the two fronts, Anzio was the most precarious. The Germans enjoyed higher ground in the Alban Hills, while the Allies occupied the low-lying beachhead. From their positions, the Germans could easily observe movements of American and British forces. The Allied position was not only low, but it was small—only eleven by eight miles. Due to the beachhead's small area and clear visibility, German artillery could strike anywhere in the encampment. Even areas in the rear were not a safe haven, as nurses had to wear helmets while working in half dug-in hospital tents.³¹ During the four months at Anzio, there were 92 medical personnel killed and 367 wounded.³² General Mark Clark noted that “any time the enemy fired a shell in our direction it was almost certain to hit something.”³³

Furman arrived at Anzio on March 17, 1944, nearly two months after the initial invasion. A number of troops were pouring in from Naples to bolster Allied forces on the beachhead. The entrenched divisions had taken a beating since January, and 14,000 replacements arrived in March to replenish the divisions to full strength.³⁴ The operating force also increased to seven divisions; five were American and two were British.³⁵

³¹ Homer Ankrum, “The 34th Infantry Division in World War II,” Published in *The Iowa Militiaman*, Spring Quarter 1991, 20.

³² Blumenson, 165.

³³ Mark W. Clark, *Calculated Risk* (New York: Harper Publishing, 1950), 282.

³⁴ Fred Sheehan, *Anzio: Epic of Bravery* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), 187.

³⁵ Lloyd Clark, 271.

Furman's assignment was to the 135th Infantry Regiment of the 34th Division. Known as the Red Bulls, the 34th Division had earned the distinction of being the first American unit dispatched to the European Theatre after Pearl Harbor.³⁶ The Red Bulls had already fought brutal battles in North Africa and Sicily. Thus, the division already contained battle-seasoned veterans when Furman joined the outfit.

Furman's Chain of Command

Assignment	Approximate Strength	Commander	Other equal units
Italian Campaign		General Harold Alexander (British)	-
Fifth Army	250K	Lieutenant General Mark Clark	British Eighth Army
VI Corps	30-80K	Major General Lucian Truscott	II Corps and X (British) Corps
34 th Division (The Red Bulls)	15K	Major General Charles Ryder	45 th and 3 rd Infantry Divisions and others
135 th Infantry Regiment	2000-3000	Lieutenant Colonel Ray Erickson (starting May 5)	133 rd and 168 th Regiments and others
3 rd Battalion	300-1000	Lieutenant Colonel Fillmore Mearns	1 st and 2 nd Battalion (briefly the 100 th Battalion at Lanuvio)
Company L	70-250	Major Joe Humble (starting May 4)	Company I, K, and M
Furman's squad	9-10	Staff Sergeant David Lopez	-

³⁶ John Hougén, *The Story of the Famous 34th Infantry Division* (Nashville: Battery Press, 1949), available online, <http://www.34infdiv.org/history/34narrhist.html>, 1.

Although the Allies held their ground at Anzio, the ever-present danger made the Anzio “entrenchment” appear more like entrapment. German propaganda referred to the beachhead as the largest self-supporting prisoner-of-war camp in the world.³⁷ The Allies’ precarious circumstances had to shock newcomers like Furman, but even veterans felt a twinge of fear when they arrived on the beachhead. Reverend Allen McSween, who had already fought in North Africa against Erwin Rommel’s Panzer Divisions, referred to Anzio as the worst place he had ever been.³⁸ Reverend McSween would serve as Furman’s chaplain in the 3rd Battalion. McSween was not the only soldier who expressed his disgust of Anzio. “The sooner we got out of this situation, the better I thought it would be,” recalled Colonel Richard Wilkinson, a Red Bull soldier from the 133rd Regiment.³⁹

Preparation characterized Furman’s experience at Anzio. Troops arrived from Naples and organized for an offensive assault out from the beachhead, while the Germans improved on their defensive positions. The potential for death was imminent, but neither the Allies nor the Germans attempted a large-scale attack through April and most of May. Instead, both sides traded artillery fire and braced for an impending attack. Historian Martin Blumenson noted that an eerie atmosphere loomed over the beachhead, generating an “ominous calm” that occurs before a great battle.⁴⁰

³⁷ Lloyd Clark, 256.

³⁸ Irene McSween, phone interview, 4 June 2009.

³⁹ Richard Wilkinson, *The Breakthrough Battalion: Battles of Company C of the 133rd Infantry Regiment, Tunisia and Italy, 1943-1945* (Saline, Michigan: McNaughton & Gunn, 2005), 71.

⁴⁰ Blumenson, 168.

Furman Eager for Action

If such an ominous calm existed, Furman failed to recognize it. Instead, he found himself painfully unoccupied when at the rear. The ambitious farmboy, who had known hard work since childhood, had difficulty adjusting to the life of entrenchment. “I don’t do anything but lay around and sleep...you know that is a hard job,” he noted in a letter home.⁴¹ The inactivity of the daytime had to be a tough adjustment. Since he was a boy, he was accustomed to farming as long as there was sunlight. Yet at Anzio, he had to spend all day in a hole as moving soldiers made easy targets for enemy fire. Any activity from troops came after dusk when Furman was used to sleeping. Colonel Wilkinson recalled that “daylight movement...was impossible without attracting enemy artillery fire. Consequently, all of our movements were made at night.”⁴²

While at the front, patrols in enemy territory were a dangerous affair, and Furman’s experience was no exception. In a 2009 interview, Lloyd Hendricks recalled the Red Bulls’ experience while relieving the 45th Division in April. The soldiers crawled on their bellies for 15 miles over the course of three nights, taking cover during the day. Unable to see his comrades in the darkness, Lloyd often felt completely alone. The soldiers’ only safeguard was a communication cable that ran along the ground, which they would grab to guide themselves to their destination.⁴³ Although Lloyd and Furman never saw one another at Anzio, Lloyd was never more than a couple of miles from his childhood companion.

⁴¹ Furman Smith, “Letter to Homer,” 24 May 1944, copy obtained from Nancy McJunkin, Taylor Family Archives.

⁴² Wilkinson, 71.

⁴³ Lloyd Hendricks, personal interview, 8 June 2009.

The relief of the 34th Division was Furman's first combat experience, and it earned him a Combat Infantryman Badge for exemplary conduct in action against the enemy.⁴⁴ During the six-day effort in the middle of April, Furman's Company L had three men killed in combat. These KIAs were the only deaths from his company during the entrenchment period, which spanned just over two months from March 17 to May 22.⁴⁵

Although the casualties suffered by Furman's company were relatively few when compared to other units, the psychological effect of Anzio was still immense on the soldiers. The terrible noise from artillery rounds made his battalion's chaplain Allen McSween pray, "Lord, stop this awful sound."⁴⁶ Lloyd Hendricks mentioned that once he could feel air rush across his face as German artillery shells flew through the air. "It felt like death was constantly staring me in the face," recalled the Red Bull veteran.⁴⁷ When asked if Anzio was any tougher than Cassino, former 135th soldier Norbert Ulrich, who fought in both battles, replied, "Oh hell yeah."⁴⁸

Despite this never-ending threat of death at Anzio, Furman never mentioned the danger to his family. Instead, his letters home always had a positive, light-hearted attitude. Rather than mention artillery, trenches, and aircraft bombings, Furman told his mother, "This is a pretty place over here."⁴⁹ It was not a complete lie. By the time Furman arrived, poppies were in bloom at the beachhead. In spite of the war, the area

⁴⁴ "Medal of Honor to Infantryman Who Died Facing Assault of 80 Germans," War Department: Bureau of Public Relations, 16 January 1945, Taylor Family Archives.

⁴⁵ "Death Casualties List, 135th Regiment."

⁴⁶ Irene McSween, phone interview, 4 June 2009.

⁴⁷ Lloyd Hendricks, personal interview, 8 June 2009.

⁴⁸ Norbert Ulrich, personal interview, 17 July 2009.

⁴⁹ Furman Smith, "Letter to Mother, Dad, and all," 15 May 1944, Taylor Family Archives.

enjoyed clear skies and pleasant weather.⁵⁰ Others also took notice of the scenery. Colonel Wilkinson noted that “blossoms of magnificent wildflowers bloomed in carpets of tufted grass which had not been grazed because of the war. [It was a] peaceful, pastoral scene.”⁵¹

Furman’s thoughts often drifted to home. With constant reminders from his family, it would have been hard to forget. His mother Oley wrote him four to five letters every week, and his older sister Ethel wrote him three to four. “I sure am glad to get them, Mama,” he wrote.⁵² The typically short-spoken Furman could not keep up with the amount of writing his family did. Nevertheless, in his short responses, he always attempted to shield his family from worry, and his letters did provide a brief relief from their concern. Families back home would often go weeks without receiving any word from their loved ones. Then two or three letters would arrive at once.⁵³ For Furman’s family, these were blessed announcements that he was still alive and doing well.

Never did Furman allow his family to fret over his well-being. In one letter, Furman’s father Charlie had the unfortunate burden of telling Furman that his dog had contracted rabies and had to be shot. Furman quickly relieved his father of any guilt, saying that he did not mind because it had been sick.⁵⁴

He also let his family know that he was not going hungry. “We get a right smart to eat, but it’s not from home,” wrote Furman.⁵⁵ He did have one request while at Anzio,

⁵⁰ Sheehan, 164-65.

⁵¹ Wilkinson, 77.

⁵² Furman Smith, “Letter to Mother, Dad, and all,” 15 May 1944, Taylor Family Archives.

⁵³ Frances McSween, phone interview, 2 June 2009.

⁵⁴ Harlan Edwards.

⁵⁵ Furman Smith, “Letter to Mother, Dad, and all,” 15 May 1944, Taylor Family Archives.

which likely touched his mother's heart. He asked Oley to send a box of her home cooking. When Furman had been at Fort McClellan, his mother would make his favorite dish, baked sweet potatoes and sending it to him in the mail.⁵⁶ Care packages were one of the few luxuries for the Red Bulls at Anzio. They offered a change of pace from their normal rations, but they were also something proactive loved ones could do to make war a little more tolerable for their soldiers. Frances, the wife of Harry McSween from Furman's battalion, recalled that getting together with other girlfriends and making treats for their soldiers was an enjoyable wartime experience.⁵⁷ Furman had hope that his mother's gift could make it to Italy and still be edible. Probably a hopeless cause, but it could have helped Oley to imagine that Furman was able to enjoy comforts from home.

The danger at Anzio did not affect Furman's sense of humor. In another letter, he imagined what was going on at the farm and poked fun at his younger brother. He joked, "I guess the cotton is up by now...is Mit plowing the horse too hard?"⁵⁸ Further teasing with his seven-year-old sister, Furman warned his parents, "Tell Martha to not court too much."⁵⁹ None of his loved ones escaped his memory. Furman even diverted his family's attention by pretending to worry about his chickens. Despite the blasting artillery shells and screaming aircraft that were constantly reminding him of his own danger, he asked his parents, "How are my bannies doing?"⁶⁰

Although his mood was comical and pleasant with his parents and younger siblings, Furman was a bit more candid with his older relatives. To his cousin Wilborn,

⁵⁶ David Hendricks, phone interview, 24 December 2008.

⁵⁷ Frances McSween, phone interview, 2 June 2009.

⁵⁸ Furman Smith, "Letter to Mother, Dad, and all," 15 May 1944, Taylor Family Archives.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Furman revealed that Aleen was constantly on his mind. “You know I am engaged,” Furman happily announced, revealing that his commitment to the young girl continued to give him courage.⁶¹ In letters to Aleen, Furman would send cash as a jump-start for their lives after the war.⁶² With the money, Aleen began filling an old icebox with pots, pans, and blankets—preparing for their future together.⁶³ But the thought that he might not make it back had to be on Furman’s mind. “I am a long ways from my girl,” he said to Wilborn. “I sure would like to be back with [her].”⁶⁴

To his brother Homer, Furman never described any horrific images, but he simply wrote, “I hope you didn’t pass for the army.”⁶⁵ Furman’s statement was not for sympathy, but he hoped that he was the only family member that would have to endure the deplorable situation at Anzio.

General Mark Clark’s Desire for Rome

Furman was desperate for a change from the entrenchment lifestyle, but no one in the Allied force was more eager for action than the highest-ranking American in the campaign, General Mark Clark. Clark was an ambitious commander, who was anxious to gain glory for himself and his American troops. He felt his Americans in the Fifth Army had been the driving force during the Italian Campaign, particularly at Salerno.

⁶¹ Furman Smith, “Letter to Wilborn Merck,” 14 May 1944, copy obtained from Diane Sloan, Taylor Family Archives.

⁶² Eleanor Smith, personal interview, 3 June 2009.

⁶³ Alice Callahan, personal interview, 16 March 2009.

⁶⁴ Furman Smith, “Letter to Wilborn Merck,” 14 May 1944, copy obtained from Diane Sloan, Taylor Family Archives.

⁶⁵ Furman Smith, “Letter to Homer Smith,” 24 May 1944, copy obtained from Nancy McJunkin, Taylor Family Archives

However, Clark's immediate superior British General Harold Alexander always appeared to slant information in a way that gave credit to British troops—at least from Clark's point of view.⁶⁶ The stalemate at Anzio was doing nothing to rectify the situation. Nearly a year had passed in Italy, and American troops still had little to show for their efforts.

While General Clark was frustrated, the “great prize” of the Italian Campaign still remained unclaimed.⁶⁷ Rome, one of the three Axis capitals, was less than 40 miles away from Anzio.⁶⁸ Its capture would bring global recognition, for both General Clark and his American troops. It was a potential for redemption.

The city was important strategically, but its importance historically was even greater. In ancient times, Rome was the pinnacle of western civilization. Even Hannibal, one of the greatest commanders who ever lived, was unable to breach its walls. No army in 1,500 years had conquered the legendary city from the south. If General Clark could cross the Tiber River and enter Rome, he would be on common ground with the legendary Julius Caesar, who crossed the Rubicon to make his mark on history. Clark's troops could march past renowned structures such as the Coliseum, the Arch of Constantine, and Saint Peter's Basilica. While the liberation of the Italian peninsula would not be complete, the country's greatest jewel would be in Allied hands. It was an honor that General Clark felt should be reserved for his soldiers—and himself.

⁶⁶ Blumenson, 37.

⁶⁷ General Clark's memoirs, *Calculated Risk*, referred to an entire chapter as “Rome, the Great Prize.”

⁶⁸ Distance determined from modern day locations using Google maps.

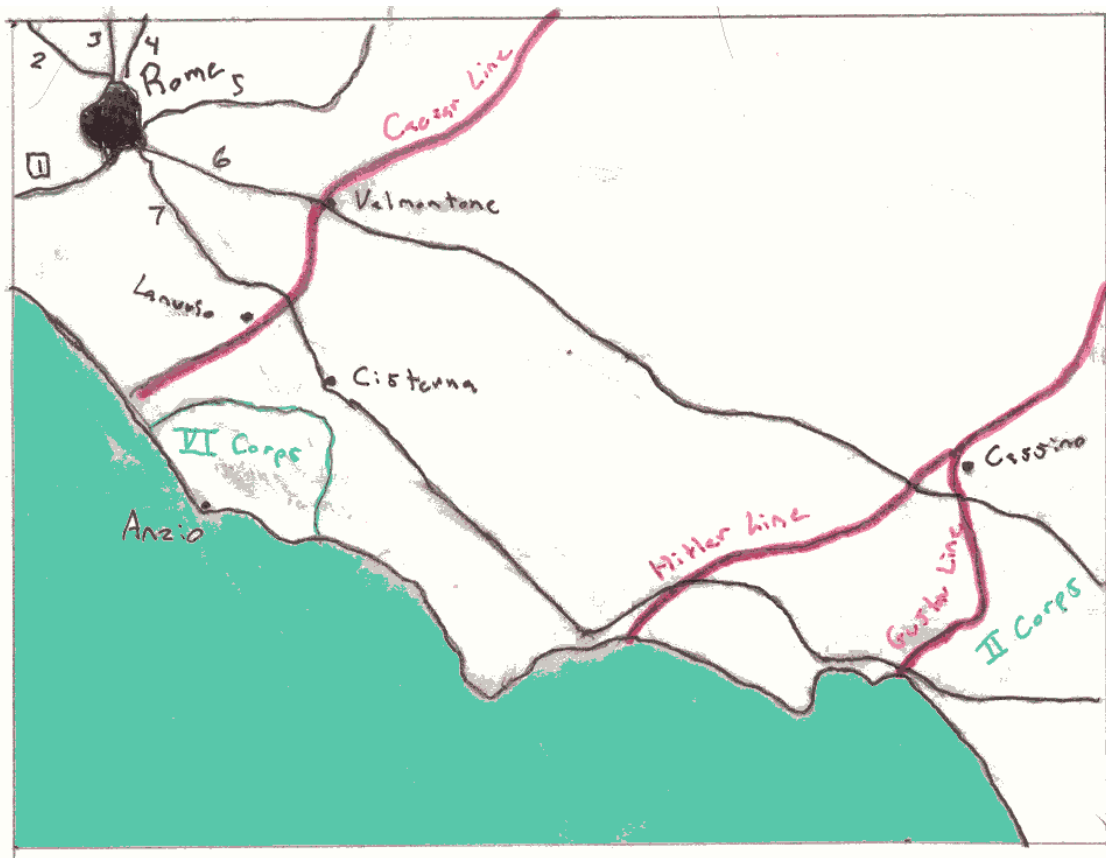
However, General Clark did not have time on his side; the greatest invasion of the war was about to commence on the shores of Normandy. The massive invasion of France (later known as D-Day) was just days away. Once it began, all media coverage would shift to the Allied efforts there. The Italian Campaign would become a sideshow compared to the assault of Western Europe. With the date for D-Day looming closer every day, Clark's opportunity for glory was fading rapidly. Clark needed a change in the situation at Anzio, and he needed it fast.

The Breakout from Anzio, May 23-25, 1944

The spring offensive to liberate Rome (Operation Diadem) finally began on May 11, 1944—Furman's 19th birthday. Southeast of Anzio, the Allies achieved a breakthrough against the Gustav Line. The men on the southern front finally succeeded in taking territory along the southern front including Cassino, which had remained out of Allied hands for nearly five months.

With the breach of the Gustav Line, a breakout from Anzio was soon to follow.⁶⁹ The surge from the beachhead commenced the morning of May 23. The target was Cisterna to the northeast. The town rested along Highway 7, which was one of two roads that entered Rome from the south. Capturing Cisterna would give the Allies control of half the transportation routes in southern Italy.

⁶⁹ Starr, 228.



The Roads to Rome, May 1944⁷⁰

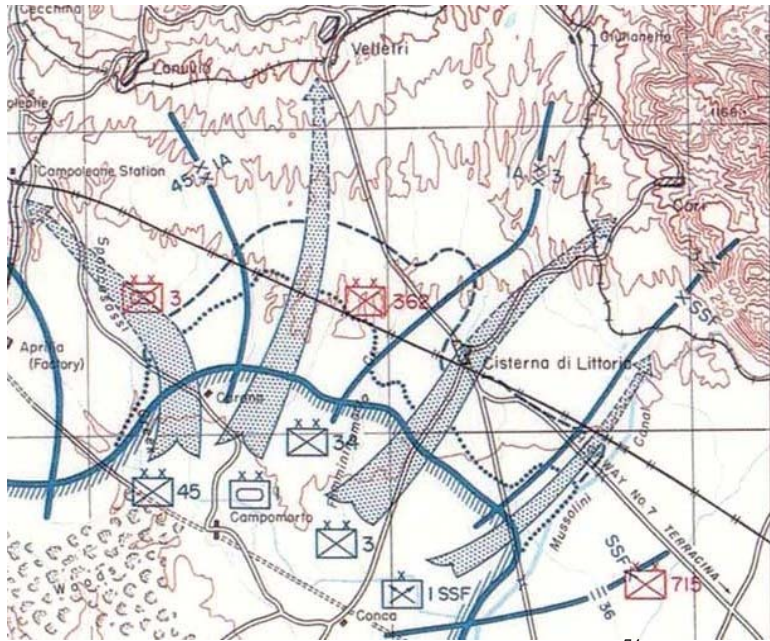
The plan was for the Red Bull Division to clear minefields for an assault by three divisions: the 1st Special Service Force, the 3rd Infantry Division, and the 1st Armored Division.⁷¹ While most of the Red Bulls were in charge of clearing minefields, Furman's 135th Regiment was separated from its normal assignment and attached to the 1st Armored Division.⁷² Supporting the tanks, Furman's regiment would become one of the key units driving out from Anzio. For two days, the main assault came from the

⁷⁰ Illustration by author.

⁷¹ Starr, 229.

⁷² Hougen, 26.

regiment's 1st Battalion at the left flank and the 2nd Battalion on the right. Furman's 3rd Battalion moved into the regiment's reserve.⁷³



The thrust of the Anzio breakout to Cisterna⁷⁴

The outcome of the attack was a huge success for Furman's regiment with the 1st Armored Division. It captured 300 prisoners and seized large amounts of territory. The 1st and 2nd Battalions at the front of the attack endured the heaviest losses, suffering a combined 148 casualties during the first three days of the breakout. Furman's 3rd Battalion, however, suffered only 15.⁷⁵

After three days, the entire breakout from Anzio was a clear success. The Allies had cut Highway 7 leading to Rome while suffering fewer casualties and capturing more

⁷³ "A Partial History, 135th Infantry Regiment," available online, <http://www.34infdiv.org/history/135narrhist.html>, 22-28.

⁷⁴ Map is from *The Anzio Breakout*, 118.

⁷⁵ Casualty numbers were compiled by the author from statistics in the *135th Infantry Regiment*

of the enemy than expected.⁷⁶ The two Allied fronts (the VI Corps from Anzio and the II Corps from the former Gustav Line) had merged. Colonel Wilkinson summarized the common soldier's viewpoint when he recalled, "I was happy to get out of there."⁷⁷

A Shift Towards Rome, May 25-26, 1944

Looking to capitalize on the success along both fronts, British General Harold Alexander had a plan to end the campaign. He wanted General Clark's VI Corps, under the command of General Lucian Truscott, to continue its drive northeast and capture the town of Valmontone, which rested along Highway 6. With Highway 7 already under Allied control, the fall of Valmontone would cut off the final escape route for Germany's 10th Army. Alexander hoped that the enemy would then be smashed between General Clark's IV Corps and the rest of the Allied campaign force.

Despite the opportunity to trap Germany's 10th Army, General Clark found himself in a quandary when he received Alexander's orders. For one, he had serious doubts about the plan's chance of success.⁷⁸ Highway 6 was not the only escape route for the Germans, and the defensive General Kesselring was not one to allow himself to be surrounded. Furthermore, General Clark felt that Rome, not the destruction of the 10th Army, was the "great prize" of the Italian Campaign. Capturing Rome was supposed to be the Americans' redemption, a tangible accomplishment after so much frustration in

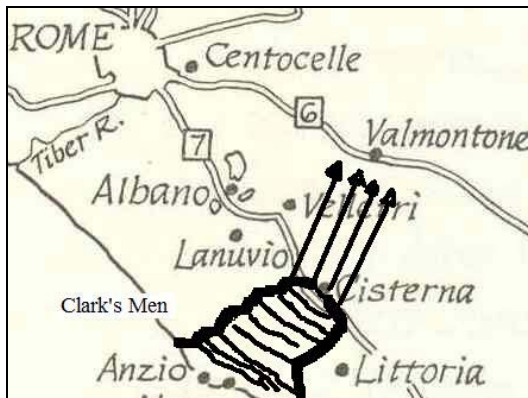
⁷⁶ Starr, 239.

⁷⁷ Wilkinson, phone interview, 4 June 2009.

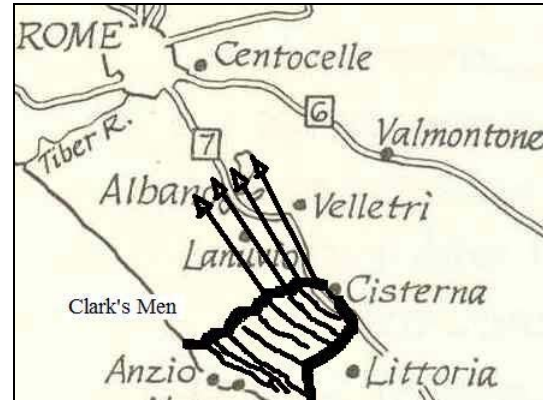
⁷⁸ Mathews, 354-356.

Italy. Now with breakout of the VI Corps, General Clark was closer than ever to his goal, and Alexander was ordering him in the other direction.

General Clark had a clear dilemma. He could dutifully comply with Alexander's orders and send all five divisions of his VI Corps to cut Highway 6. However, the most direct route to Rome appeared to be northwest through the Alban Hills up Highway 7. While this appeared to be the quickest route to Rome, it would require a defiance of Alexander's orders.⁷⁹



Alexander's orders to take Valmontone on Highway 6



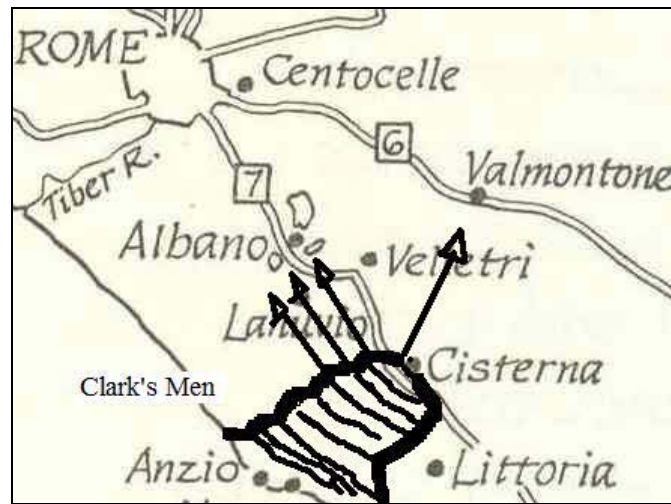
Clark's wish to follow Highway 7 to Rome

Instead, General Clark chose a third option and split his VI Corps into two groups. Part of his force continued on to Valmontone, while the majority of his attack turned northwest to capture Rome. Clark believed that he had enough manpower to take Valmontone, while sending the bulk of his VI Corps up Highway 7 towards Rome.⁸⁰ This split revealed that General Clark did not whole-heartedly accept Alexander's orders, but capturing Highway 6 would at least accomplish the basic objective General

⁷⁹ Mathews, 354-356.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 354-356.

Alexander had given him. After all, General Clark did not believe Alexander's plan to destroy the 10th Army was a feasible proposition anyway.



Clark's course of action

On the evening of May 25, instead of proceeding on to Highway 6, General Clark ordered the majority of the VI Corps northwest to the Alban Hills.⁸¹ The order sent Furman's Red Bull Division towards Lanuvio, where the Germans had some of their best defensive positions waiting for them. As the VI Corps shifted to follow its new direction of attack, Furman took time to write his brother Homer. Echoing the sentiments of General Clark, Furman appeared to be eager. "It is a good job," Furman said of combat. After telling his brother not to inform his mother that he was in action, he concluded, "I will close until next time. Answer soon. Lots of Love, Furman."⁸² These words would be the last he wrote in Italy to his family.

⁸¹ Ibid., 240.

⁸² Furman Smith, "Letter to Homer," 24 May 1944, copy obtained from Nancy McJunkin, Taylor Family Archives.

As the thrust of the attack shifted northeast, Furman's regiment was detached from the 1st Armored Division and sent back to its normal assignment with the rest of the Red Bulls. Once reunited with the division, Furman's regiment moved into reserve, as a reward for its efforts during the Anzio breakout.⁸³ Furman's battalion had been in reserve during the majority of its time with the tanks, and with the reassignment of the 135th Regiment, Furman was in reserve once again. Because of these assignments, Furman's battalion had avoided the most intense combat thus far in the drive for Rome.

The reunited Red Bulls made progress with the new direction of attack, as the 133rd and 168th Regiments continued to gain territory. Furman's 135th Regiment followed closely behind the advance. For three days, the Red Bulls pushed forward with mild resistance from the enemy.⁸⁴

Nearing the Caesar Line, May 27-30, 1944

By May 27, the Red Bulls, along with the rest of the VI Corps, faced a more daunting defensive effort. They were no longer pursuing retreating enemy forces after the breakout of Anzio; General Clark's men had finally reached Kesselring's Caesar Line.

During the four months of stalemate at Anzio, General Kesselring had not left his German army idle. As the Allies were organizing for a breakout from the beachhead, Kesselring had been preparing defensively to make a last stand for Rome. Utilizing a railroad that stretched from Lanuvio to Velletri, Kesselring fortified the area with bunkers

⁸³ Hougen, 26.

⁸⁴ Starr, 245.

and positions for mortars and machine guns. Its elevated ground would further aid a defensive stand. Every part of the area had a military function; the Germans even converted the Villa Crocetta into a fortress. Only 20 miles from the Italian capital, the Caesar Line was the last obstacle standing between Clark's VI Corps and Rome. Despite the superior Allied air capabilities, Kesselring was so confident in the defenses along the railroad that he believed the Caesar Line could hold out indefinitely against the Allies.⁸⁵

The defenses where Furman's Red Bull Division was heading were particularly challenging, as the Germans had installed deep connecting trenches, dugouts in the sides of banks, and command post installations.⁸⁶ Troops on the ground noticed the intricate work the enemy had done. "The Germans had not hastily built this defensive line; rather, they methodically built it over a period of time, constructing numerous firing bunkers on the hilly terrain that were excellent for defense," remarked Colonel Wilkinson.⁸⁷ The entrenched German troops proved to be worthy foes. Against this section of the Caesar Line, the Red Bulls attacked vainly for three days.⁸⁸ A history of the 135th Regiment recorded the difficulty of driving the enemy from their position:

The only cover and defilade in these open approaches to the enemy's position were supplied by steep-sided, deep, muddy bottomed gullies which had been cut by streams draining down from the hill masses. With such favorable terrain to defend, the enemy, always a master in the construction of defensive positions, had here, before Lanuvio, perhaps surpassed his best previous efforts.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Blumenson, 169.

⁸⁶ Starr, 247.

⁸⁷ Wilkinson, 85.

⁸⁸ Starr, 247.

⁸⁹ *135th Infantry Regiment, 34th Infantry Division World War II History, 1941-1945*, phase X, page 12, available online, Military History Network, <http://www.milhist.net/goldstar/x2011/index.html>.

By May 30, the entire drive against the Caesar Line appeared halted.⁹⁰ While the Red Bulls struggled in front of Lanuvio, the 1st Armored Division and 45th Division stalled along the Albano Road to their left. The 36th Division on their right was having similar difficulties around Velletri. Where May 23-25 had great success for the VI Corps, May 27-30 saw few gains at all.

The stiff resistance by the Germans put General Clark in a tough position. He had changed the thrust of his assault on May 25 in order to take Rome as quickly as possible. Since that decision, it had been a much different story for the Americans—one with high casualties and few territorial gains against the Caesar Line. Meanwhile, the issue on the southern front had been decided; the Allies had routed the enemy.⁹¹ Advancing French, British, and American troops on the southern front could potentially pass General Clark's Americans at the Caesar Line. Unless his troops broke the Germans' defenses soon, General Clark still might be forced to share the glory of conquering Rome. Further complicating the matter was the impending invasion of France, which would steal all media attention from the Italian Campaign and could occur any day. If his troops stalled much longer, all of General Clark's efforts would be for nothing.

135th Regiment Sent Into Action, May 31, 1944⁹²

Just south of Lanuvio, it was clear that Furman's Red Bull Division needed an extra push if it was going to break the Caesar Line. Furman's regiment moved out from

⁹⁰ Starr, 250.

⁹¹ Ibid., 250.

⁹² This date is listed as May 30 according to a few sources. The chronology for actions during the Battle of Lanuvio varies among many sources.

reserve to bolster the division's left flank. After reserve duty for much of the Anzio breakout, Furman's battalion finally saw front line action against the brutal Caesar Line. The commander of the Red Bull Division, General Charles W. Ryder, pulled out all stops and even sent the 109th Engineer Battalion into action as infantry. The next three days would constitute the most forceful drive of the Italian Campaign.⁹³

The plan for the attack placed Furman's battalion on the left flank and the 1st Battalion on the right. The 2nd Battalion had been removed from the regiment and attached to the 1st Armored Division since May 27. To fill the void left by the absence of the 2nd Battalion, the 100th Battalion temporarily joined the regiment and it remained in reserve.⁹⁴

Furman had seen men die. His 3rd Battalion had lost 16 men to death during its two months of entrenchment at Anzio. Since the breakout from the beachhead, the unit in eight days had lost another 15 men.⁹⁵ However, nothing would prepare him for the carnage he was about to witness. May 31 and June 1 would become the bloodiest days in the history of the Red Bull Division.⁹⁶

The morning of May 31 began with an artillery barrage in a narrow zone between the 45th Division to the left and Furman's regiment. After a 30-minute artillery bombardment, Furman's regiment charged across rolling wheat fields into the German defenses. The enemy strongly resisted the attack with intense mortar, machine gun, and artillery fire raining down on Furman's regiment. The opposition was too intense for the

⁹³ Starr, 254.

⁹⁴ "A Partial History, 135th Infantry Regiment," 25-28.

⁹⁵ "Death Casualties List, 135th Regiment."

⁹⁶ Ankrum, 23.

1st Battalion on the right flank to make any headway, and it failed to move forward for days.⁹⁷

Furman's battalion on the left proved more successful and was able to surge ahead of the 1st Battalion. The extended position cost Furman's battalion, as the men suffered friendly artillery fire and were unable to stop the accidental bombardment due to communication problems. The forward position also left the 3rd Battalion exposed in an unfavorable lowland area.⁹⁸ Germans on higher ground massacred the vulnerable American soldiers. The deadly lowland area earned the dastardly moniker of "Bloody Gulch."⁹⁹ Casualties were so severe that three-quarter ton trucks were needed to haul out the bodies.¹⁰⁰

Medical personnel heroically attempted to save every life possible in Bloody Gulch. As medics rushed to the wounded soldiers, Germans fired upon them despite their Red Cross insignia.¹⁰¹ Two medics from Furman's 3rd Battalion, Ellis Crews and Leon "Pop" Hunt, made numerous trips with their stretcher, attempting to assist every wounded soldier possible. As they were resting for a return trip, enemy soldiers opened fire on the men and killed them.¹⁰² Another litter carrier took fire from a machine gun, which splattered him with bullets from his forehead to his boots.¹⁰³ The Germans even targeted

⁹⁷ "A Partial History, 135th Infantry Regiment," 25-28.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 25-28.

⁹⁹ "A Partial History, 135th Infantry Regiment," 25-28

¹⁰⁰ Ankrum, 22.

¹⁰¹ "A Partial History, 135th Infantry Regiment," 25-28

¹⁰² "Death Casualty Biographies: 135th Infantry," updated Feb 22, 2002, obtained by author from Jeff Brown, webmaster for the 34th Division official website, <http://www.34thinfantry.com>.

¹⁰³ *135th Infantry Regiment*, phase X, page 20.

hospitals. Ralph B. Schaps, an injured member of Furman's regiment, recalled airplanes continuing to drop bombs even though the structure had a Red Cross symbol overhead.¹⁰⁴

In spite of these savage tactics, Furman's battalion defended its position. Launching a series of assaults with grenades and bayonets, the battalion surged at a trench system with shell-proof dugouts that was protected by barbed wire and machine guns. By nightfall, the battalion had captured two enemy strongholds, thus seizing a portion of the Caesar Line.¹⁰⁵ However, this achievement was not without a cost. The carnage left Furman's Company L completely decimated. Since Furman had joined the unit in March, it had lost 32 men to death and injury. Yet on May 31 alone, they suffered a staggering 40 casualties.¹⁰⁶ As a result, Company L was no longer a viable unit, and its squads were separated into Company K and Company I.¹⁰⁷ Losses across the entire battalion had been severe. In one day, the battalion had lost over two-thirds of the men that had been killed during the entire entrenchment period at Anzio.

After experiencing the vicious fighting against the Caesar Line at Lanuvio, the plan was for the 36th Division to relieve the Red Bull Division.¹⁰⁸ However, a discovery by the 36th Division on May 31 prevented this replacement. In one of the greatest blunders of the campaign, the Germans had left a portion of their Caesar Line completely unmanned. Believing that Mount Artemisio was too difficult to scale, the Germans placed no defenses in the area. American forces quickly took advantage of the mistake.

¹⁰⁴ Ralph B. Schaps, *500 Days of Front Line Combat: the WWII Memoir of Ralph B. Schaps*, (New York: iUniverse, 2003), 114.

¹⁰⁵ "A Partial History, 135th Infantry Regiment," 25-28

¹⁰⁶ Casualty numbers were compiled by the author from statistics in the *135th Infantry Regiment, 34th Infantry Division World War II History*.

¹⁰⁷ *135th Infantry Regiment*, Phase X, page 16.

¹⁰⁸ W.G.F. Jackson, *The Battle for Rome* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1969), 201.

While Furman and the rest of the Red Bulls were fighting fiercely on their left flank, the 36th Division had advanced on Mount Artemisio and captured the area without firing a shot.¹⁰⁹ Because the 36th Division was now occupying the heights of Mount Artemisio, it could not relieve the Red Bull Division; Furman would have to face another day of front line combat.

By the evening of May 31, the situation against the Caesar Line looked much better for the Americans than it had the night before. The 36th Division had captured a segment of the Caesar Line without contest, and on its left, the Red Bull Division had also penetrated enemy defenses at Lanuvio. One final push could obliterate the Caesar Line and leave the road to Rome open.¹¹⁰

General Clark believed he was finally in a position to claim the prize that had long eluded him. The commanding general called for one final furious assault.¹¹¹ “We were preparing for an all-out attack, and I emphasized to all subordinate commanders that we had to crack through this time if the Fifth Army was going to do the job,” Clark recalled.¹¹² Furman’s officers in the Red Bull Division received the message. In his history of the Red Bulls, John Hougen recorded that “nothing was held back. Rome was the goal—all or nothing.”¹¹³

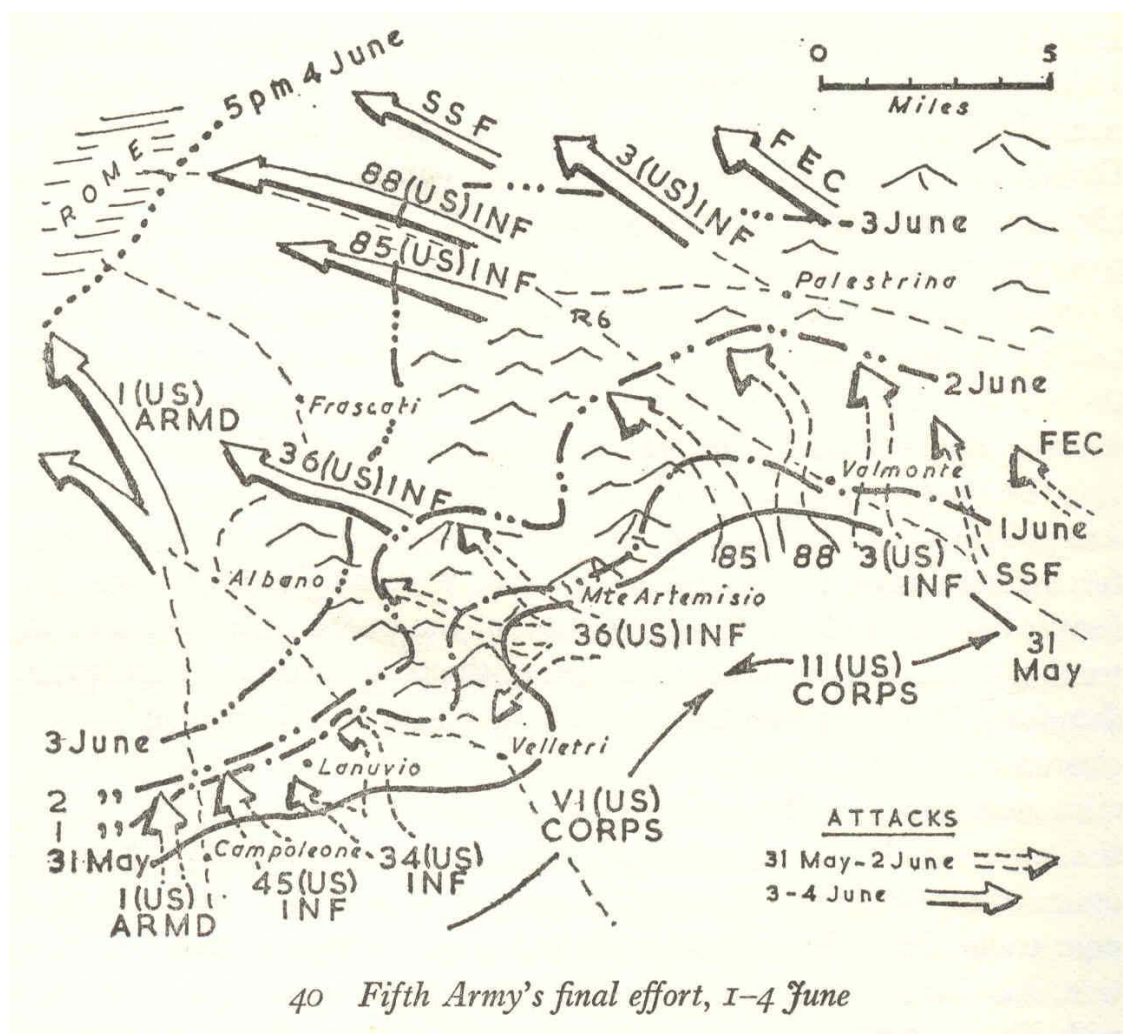
¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 202.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 203.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 203.

¹¹² Mark Clark, 286.

¹¹³ Hougen, 26.



Breaking the Caesar Line¹¹⁴

All-Out Attack, June 1, 1944

The morning of June 1, the 3rd Battalion again headed the 135th Regiment's assault on Lanuvio with Furman's squad serving as the lead unit.¹¹⁵ The squad leader Staff Sergeant David Lopez was instrumental in the assault. Blocking the company were

¹¹⁴ Jackson, 204.

¹¹⁵ "A Partial History, 135th Infantry Regiment," 25-28.

two machine guns that stood on a high bank 30 to 75 yards away.¹¹⁶ Lopez, wielding a Thompson sub-machine gun, crawled across the open field, shot five of the enemy, and captured the two enemy machine gun positions.¹¹⁷ The drive advanced the battalion's position 800 yards. The men of Furman's squad killed eight of the enemy and captured 18 prisoners.¹¹⁸

After Lopez's heroics, the company pressed forward past the enemy's former machine gun positions. However, the advance placed the men in a precarious position. For the second time in as many days, the units on the battalion's flanks (the 45th Division on the left and the 1st Battalion of the 135th Regiment to the right), could not equal the 3rd Battalion's forward thrust. The surge also prevented any support from Allied artillery, as there was not a good visual of the area.¹¹⁹ Perhaps the friendly fire incident from the day before made the American artillery personnel unwilling to take another chance at injuring their own troops. With their flanks exposed and without artillery support, the battalion was vulnerable to a counterattack.

Seizing the advantage, the Germans delivered a barrage of fire from mortars and artillery, which fell on Furman's company.¹²⁰ After a blast from a final shell, a band of 80 Germans attempted to retake the position.¹²¹ Several of the Germans carried machine pistols, a fearsome automatic firearm that was not a standard issue but generously

¹¹⁶ John Pendergast, quoted in "Recommendation for Award of the Congressional Medal of Honor," Taylor Family Archives.

¹¹⁷ "A Partial History, 135th Infantry Regiment," 25-28.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 25-28.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 25-28.

¹²⁰ Fillmore Mearns, quoted in "Recommendation."

¹²¹ Ibid.

distributed among the infantry.¹²² The enemy's large numbers surprised Furman's outfit, as a knoll had screened the Germans from view.¹²³ During the onslaught, enemy fire wounded Lopez and Sergeant Orval Houser, a second noncommissioned officer from Furman's company. Lopez's leg was shattered, and Houser was barely conscious. The ferocity of the counterattack alarmed the American troops. "We were ready to get out of there," said a soldier from Furman's company who spoke with Leighton McKeithen after the battle.¹²⁴ American higher command realized they had overextended themselves and ordered the company to pull back to the enemy's former trenches, which offered a better defensive position.¹²⁵ One by one, the American soldiers escaped to safety. Most were able to evacuate with Furman's squad covering their escape. Then most of men from Furman's platoon also reached safety.¹²⁶

When it came time for Furman to retreat, he found himself unable to comply with the order. He saw Lopez and Houser on the battlefield, too wounded to retreat under their own power, and he hesitated to leave his fallen comrades. Instead of falling back with the rest of his company, he elected to make a stand against the German force. Perhaps he was inspired by Lopez's remarkable actions and was unwilling to let such a soldier reach enemy hands. Perhaps the Germans' brutal tactics at Bloody Gulch the day before had enraged him. Regardless of his reasons, as his platoon evacuated to safer positions, Furman stayed behind. The company along with the 3rd Battalion's

¹²² Blumenson, 28.

¹²³ John Pendergast, quoted in "Recommendation."

¹²⁴ Leighton McKeithen, phone interview, 28 December 2008.

¹²⁵ "A Partial History, 135th Infantry Regiment," 25-28.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 25-28.

commander, Lieutenant Colonel Fillmore Mearns, observed from the enemy's former trenches as Furman attempted to save Lopez and Houser from harm.

A mere 20 miles from the great prize of Rome, one lone American doughboy attempted to hold off 80 Germans to save two comrades. This young farmboy, who had barely spent two months with the unit, was about to awe even the battle-seasoned veterans of the Red Bull Division. Although four thousand miles away, Furman's next actions would prove to have a resounding impact on his loved ones back home.

CHAPTER TWO

ROAMERS TO LANDOWNERS TO NEARLY SHARECROPPERS:

THE SMITH FAMILY IN SOUTH CAROLINA, 1845-1943

On the other side of the Atlantic, Furman's family eagerly awaited his return to the farm. For 18 years, his home had shaped what he had become as a man—hardworking, dependable, and tenacious. This hometown had somehow produced a soldier that was willing to risk his life to save his comrades. Yet his principles were endemic to Pickens County, a community of family farmers. Ben Robertson, a native of Pickens County who wrote his memoir as Furman was growing up, recalled, "Like Jefferson, we believe in a country of small farms, with every family independent, in a country that is tempted neither by poverty nor by great wealth but is hedged about by goodness and truth."¹²⁷ Not everyone was a humble farmer like Furman. But with his temperance and energetic spirit, Furman represented the ideal Pickens County man. These values ran deep in Furman's blood, as he was the fourth generation of Smiths to call Pickens County home.

Tucked away in the northwest corner of the Palmetto State, Pickens County is nestled in the foothills of the ancient Blue Ridge Mountains. In Furman's day, it had no large cities or major industrial centers, but it was a haven for small farms supported by creeks which flowed into Keowee River. As had been true for decades, individual family farms characterized the county. Although poor, the labor that they required had an

¹²⁷ Ben Robertson, *Red Hills and Cotton: An Upcountry Memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1942), 8.

admirable, self-sufficient appeal. Ideally, they required the efforts of all family members working together to be successful. Stating an unofficial Pickens County code, Ben Robertson once wrote, “All that eat should sweat.”¹²⁸

While void of major urban centers within the county, Pickens County fell almost equidistant between the largest cities of three Southern states: Columbia, South Carolina; Charlotte, North Carolina; and Atlanta, Georgia. Within 150 miles of all three cities, this position had a profound effect on Pickens’s development. In 1873, a railroad was constructed to connect Atlanta and Charlotte. Dubbed the Piedmont Air-Line Railway (and renamed the Southern Railway in 1893), its halfway point ran through the lower half of Pickens County.¹²⁹ Its appearance influenced new businesses and sparked a number of towns: Calhoun (later renamed Clemson), Central, Easley, Liberty, and Norris.¹³⁰ By the turn of the century, a few cotton mills dotted the landscape. Even two colleges, Clemson and Central Wesleyan, were founded.¹³¹ In 1930, the county received its first paved roads, which connected the towns along the Southern Railway with the larger cities of Greenville and Walhalla in adjacent counties. Although the railroad had brought development to the county, agriculture was still the crux of its economy prior to World War II.¹³² Despite living a century after the Industrial Revolution, Furman’s home county was composed of a number of poor farmers who toiled in rolling fields of cotton and corn.

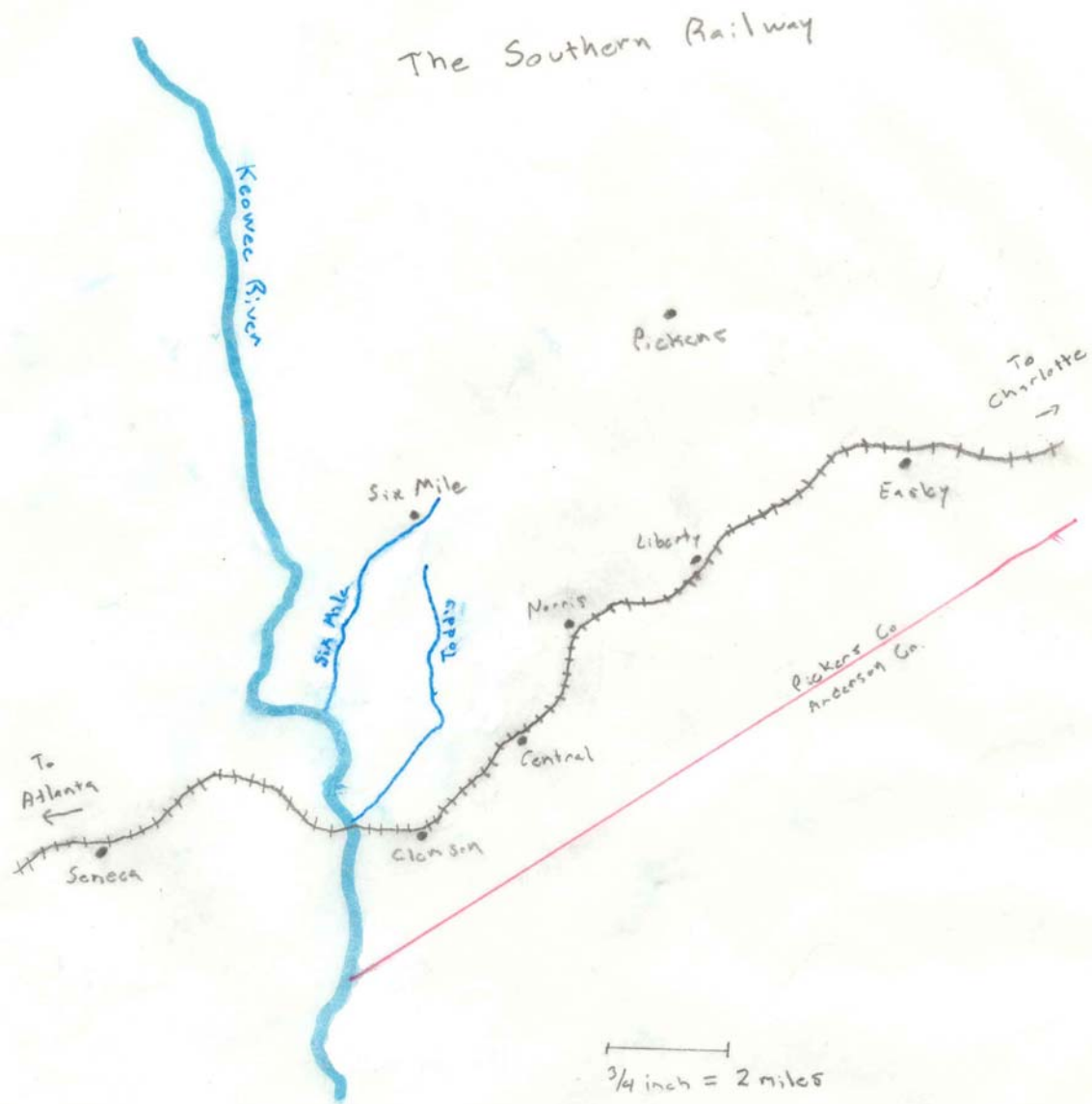
¹²⁸ Robertson, 10.

¹²⁹ H. Roger Grant, personal interview, 3 July 2009.

¹³⁰ Piper Peters Aheron, *Pickens County* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2000), 8.

¹³¹ Clemson College and the town of Clemson was originally a part of Oconee County until Keowee River was made into Lake Keowee in 1968.

¹³² Anne Sheriff, “Pickens County: A Brief History,” *Pickens County Heritage*, available online, <http://www.co.pickens.sc.us/history/>



Towns spark along the Southern Railway ¹³³

Furman's hometown of Six Mile had a unique development from the rest of Pickens County. Where most towns had developed soon after construction of the future

¹³³ Illustration by author.

Southern Railway, Six Mile was chartered 40 years after its arrival. In earlier decades, the Six Mile area's most important distinction had been a powder mill, which supplied the Confederate Army with gunpowder during the Civil War.¹³⁴ The Hagood and Sloan families, who owned the powder mill, also controlled most of the land. Smaller landowners concentrated their farms around the local waterways of Six Mile Creek and Todd's Creek. Hoping to found a mill village, the Hagoods and the Sloans decided to sell their holdings in the Six Mile area in 1909.¹³⁵ Plots along the future main street of Six Mile were drawn up and sold to various families and businesses.¹³⁶ The mill itself never arrived, as the Hagoods started a mill instead in Pickens, but Six Mile would gain its identity as a town the next year.

While towns along the Southern Railway developed, Six Mile remained virtually unchanged. By Furman's day, it was still the one-street village that it had been at its founding. Although a few textile mills had arrived in the county, Edward Jewel recalled, "Six Mile had absolutely nothing."¹³⁷ Its position north of the railroad isolated the small farming community from business opportunities elsewhere. Instead, Six Mile was a rural farming hub. Its few businesses (a cotton gin, a few corn mills, a general store, and a feed store) supported the agricultural community. Furman's hometown did have an important distinction with a 40-bed medical facility, which became Pickens County's first

¹³⁴ Leroy Stewart, personal interview, 29 January 2008.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Information comes from a map, obtained from Leroy Stewart.

¹³⁷ Maj. Edward Jewel, phone interview, 30 May 2008.

hospital when founded by Dr. David Peek in 1925 (also the year of Furman's birth).¹³⁸

Despite this unique feature, the primary occupation of the area was farming.

Nearby towns made agriculture a profitable endeavor in Six Mile. Pickens, the county seat to the northeast, along with the town of Seneca in Oconee County to the west, provided markets for Six Mile farmers. About 30 miles east, Greenville was the only nearby large city, and it influenced Six Mile's agricultural efforts by purchasing the area's milk and butter.¹³⁹

Scattered with individual family farms, Furman's hometown of Six Mile was a prototypical farming community for Ben Robertson's ideals of temperance, goodness, and truth. The families that toiled in the fields believed that their tough life created better people, who had compassion and appreciation for things that others did not.¹⁴⁰ Mary Ann Hendricks agreed, "We had to work hard so we could survive... But as a result of those times, we became stronger people."¹⁴¹ Furman would grow accustomed to this difficult work environment. After all, his family had been creek farmers for generations.

The Smith Family's Beginnings in Pickens County, 1843-1925

The Smiths had deep roots in Pickens County and had been there for nearly a century when he was drafted in 1943. Their South Carolina heritage began with Furman's great grandfather Reuben S. Smith. He was neither a native of South Carolina nor a farmer, but Reuben's descendants would become Carolina farmers after he acquired

¹³⁸ Anne Sheriff, "Pickens County: A Brief History," *Pickens County Heritage*, available online, <http://www.co.pickens.sc.us/history/>

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Maj. Edward Jewell, phone interview, 30 May 2009.

¹⁴¹ Mary Ann Hendricks, phone interview, 30 May 2009.

80 acres along Six Mile Creek. Although few people remember Reuben enough to put him on their family tree, many of his descendants still live along that creek over 120 years later.

Reuben's father had been born in New York before he went to Tennessee where Reuben was born in 1814. Like his father, Reuben would move to a different state after his marriage to Frances E. Holliday, a Carolina girl. Over his lifetime, Reuben held a number of occupations, none of which required him to own land. According to a family legend, Reuben was once a part-time bare-knuckle fighter, who fought the state champion of Tennessee to a draw. Later he also worked as a laborer in Greenville County.¹⁴² When the Civil War broke out, the 47-year-old Reuben was living in Pickens County and served in the Confederate Army with the 1st Palmetto Sharpshooters.¹⁴³ He was with the unit when Robert E. Lee surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia.¹⁴⁴ After the war, he continued in skilled labor as a stonemason.¹⁴⁵ With these various jobs, the versatile Reuben was able to forge a living without owning significant acreage.

Although Reuben was not a landowner for much of his life, his resourcefulness as a skilled laborer made life possible. Reuben, however, would still need to secure a means of living for his offspring, who might not inherit their father's multiple talents. To

¹⁴² United States 1850 Census, South Carolina, Greenville, dwelling number 1426.

¹⁴³ Neil Smith personal interview, 17 March 2009.

¹⁴⁴ *The Appomattox Roster*, R. A. Brock, *The Southern Historical Society*, 1887, available online, <http://www.researchonline.net/sccw/rosters/palshari.htm>.

¹⁴⁵ United States 1870 Census, South Carolina, Pickens County, Garvin Township, dwelling number 268, page 36.

address this issue, Reuben began purchasing land in his old age.¹⁴⁶ By 1879, Reuben had acquired 71 acres of farmland on Todd's Creek.¹⁴⁷ The seller was his former captain during the Civil War, F.L. Garvin.¹⁴⁸ Seven years later, Reuben traded his 71 acres for 80 acres on Six Mile Creek.¹⁴⁹ These 80 acres would prove to be Reuben's legacy to his descendants, as they would become farmers along Six Mile Creek. Reuben's land would remain the family's livelihood for the next 50 years.

As he approached his twilight years, Reuben had established a solid future for the Smiths. The son of a transplanted Southerner from New York, Reuben had exercised skills as a prizefighter, laborer, Confederate soldier, stonemason, and farmer. Despite living through the Civil War and the Reconstruction era, Reuben had advanced in society while many Southerners remained in extreme poverty. It took a lifetime of work, but he had secured a respectable plot of land on Six Mile Creek, enough to support two households. After moving for two generations across three states, the Smiths had finally found a home. As if planting a giant redwood, he would permanently set the Smith family's roots in Pickens County.

Furman would stem from the fourth generation of Smiths on Six Mile Creek. Perhaps subconsciously, those deep roots were what made him so heartbroken once he was pulled away to basic training. His great grandfather's lifetime efforts had resulted in

¹⁴⁶ Neil Smith, personal interview, 17 March 2009.

¹⁴⁷ Pickens County Registrar of Deeds (Pickens, SC), 10 March 1877, book C-2, 536, also 16 October 1879, book D-2, 513.

¹⁴⁸ Information comes from a roster of captains in the Palmetto Sharpshooters, available online, <http://home.freeuk.com/gazkhan/palmettos.htm>.

¹⁴⁹ Pickens County Registrar of Deeds (Pickens, SC), 9 April 1886, books G-2 and L-2, pages 542 and 158, respectively.

an 80-acre farm on Six Mile Creek, and Furman's parents were still living on that land when he was born on May 11, 1925.

A Child of the Depression, 1925-1937

Furman Leon Smith was the fifth child from the marriage of Charles Leonard Smith and Ethel Iola "Oley" Merck. He and his siblings would grow up in a period of great struggle, but his parents had already proven their resiliency during hard times. When the influenza epidemic came through in 1918, Charlie and Oley both caught the disease. They had to send their six-week-old baby Homer to live with their neighbors the Hendricks, and he survived, but the disease took the life of their first-born Eula Belle. The grief-stricken parents somehow continued on with their lives after the near pandemic. Two daughters, Essie Mae and Ethel, followed by two sons, Furman and Mit, were born after the outbreak of the disease. Three more daughters, Ellen, Hester, and Martha, would become the babies of the family. Although these children missed the epidemic, they too would become familiar with ill fortune.

The great stock market crash occurred in 1929 when Furman was just four years old. In the following years of the Great Depression, poor farmers in the Six Mile area lost any cash they had saved in banks, and the economic strife caused many families to lose their farms.¹⁵⁰ Furman's family also struggled to maintain their livelihood. Natural disasters also plagued Six Mile. A tornado also wrecked the small town in 1929, bringing property damage and loss of life to the community. Around the same time, a

¹⁵⁰ *King's Grove Baptist Church*. No publisher credited, 13-14.

flood washed away nearby Jones (corn) Mill, where Furman's father Charlie worked for supplemental income.¹⁵¹ These events began to strain the already bleak financial situation. In 1932, Charlie was forced to sell off 30 acres of the family farm.¹⁵²

Just four years later, the Smith family lost the rest of the land that Reuben had acquired 50 years earlier. The United States government was purchasing a large amount of land in the Six Mile area for a bombing range. The Smith farm was included in this purchase, and although the government compensated Charlie for his loss, the price of \$10 per acre was a meager trade for the Smiths' main source of income.¹⁵³ Charlie had purchased the Smith estate for \$10 per acre from Reuben's heirs 16 years earlier.¹⁵⁴ The forced sale gave Charlie no return on his investment and uprooted the family from their home of half a century. The land became the first great sacrifice the Smiths made to their country. It would not be their last.

In response to losing the farm, Charlie turned to his father-in-law John Thomas Merck for help. Owning more land than he could farm, John Thomas allowed his daughter's family to live on part of his holdings, which was also on Six Mile Creek. The Smiths would farm 57 acres of his land, and one bale of their cotton harvest would go to John Thomas for rent.¹⁵⁵ This offer kept the Smiths from being completely destitute, but they became merely a step above sharecroppers. Though the Smith family appeared to progress during the Reconstruction Era, events during the wake of the Great Depression devastated the family's financial situation.

¹⁵¹ Bill Holder, phone interview, 11 January 2009.

¹⁵² Pickens County Registrar of Deeds (Pickens, SC), 2 November 1932, book 4-D, page 49.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 4 June 1936, book 4G, page 321.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 18 November 1920, book FF, page 165.

¹⁵⁵ Eleanor Smith, personal interview, 3 June 2009.

With the Great Depression, natural disasters, and the loss of their 80-acre farm, it would seem that the young Furman had already experienced a lifetime of difficulties. However, there would be no relief from continuing problems. In 1937, his uncle Reuben, who shared the name of Furman's great grandfather, killed himself at dinnertime with his wife and children. A long-time sufferer of stomach problems, Reuben had finally had enough and told his family to leave the room.¹⁵⁶ Using a shotgun, he shot himself in the face, blowing off his head. A seven-year-old Lloyd Hendricks vividly remembered that "meat and blood" were stuck to the ceiling after the blast.¹⁵⁷ The horrific scene made an impression on everyone who saw it.

Also in 1937, pain in Charlie's legs became too intense for him to plow their fields.¹⁵⁸ The lingering ailments were from his bout with the Influenza Epidemic nineteen years earlier. His wife Oley also suffered those symptoms, and every night the couple had to wash and apply fresh bandages to their legs.¹⁵⁹ Losing Charlie's able body in the fields was not an option for the Smith household which had nine mouths to feed. With the oldest brother Homer already starting a family of his own, the 12-year-old Furman decided to take a great responsibility on his shoulders. In response to his father's disability, Furman, along with his 10-year-old brother Mit, dropped out of school to work full-time on the family farm.

Although barely an adolescent, Furman had capabilities far beyond his years. He did not talk much in new social situations, but Furman had a quiet confidence about him.

¹⁵⁶ Bill Holder, phone interview, 11 January 2009.

¹⁵⁷ Lloyd Hendricks, personal interview, 8 June 2009.

¹⁵⁸ Eleanor Smith, personal interview, 12 December 2008.

¹⁵⁹ Wayne Taylor, personal interview, 20 December 2008.

When he did speak, he chose his words carefully and used the intelligence of someone with a much higher education.¹⁶⁰ He also had a great memory. When he was in school, he would receive major parts in plays because he had a talent for memorizing lines.¹⁶¹ While many boys in their teenage years find themselves restless and eager to roam around, Furman was content to work on the farm and stay around his family. He did not like to “loafer” (colloquial for wander) as much as other boys his age.¹⁶² “Furman was a good boy. He never did give [us] any trouble,” recalled his mother.¹⁶³

When compared to his younger brother Mit, Furman’s maturity appeared to be much greater than their two-year difference in age. Mit loved to play practical jokes, which set him apart from his more business-minded brother. According to a family story with various versions, he and Furman were chopping firewood together when Mit started to joke around. Mit had been holding logs for his stronger brother, who would then cut them in half with a swing of his axe. After some time, the repetitive chore started to bore Mit, so he decided to place his finger in the way as Furman was about to swing. Not in the mood to fool around, Furman said to Mit, “Move it or I’ll cut it off.” Unmoved by his big brother’s threat, Mit coolly left his finger on the log. After he refused to move, Furman flinched the head of his axe, which quickly made Mit move his finger and allowed the two to continue their work. But before Furman’s next swing, Mit again placed his finger in the way. This eventually led to a game between the two brothers where Mit continued to put his finger in harm’s way for a split second before each of

¹⁶⁰ Nellie Merck Kelley Lusk, phone interview, 11 March 2009.

¹⁶¹ Harlan Edwards, 1.

¹⁶² Nellie Merck Kelley Lusk, phone interview, 11 March 2009.

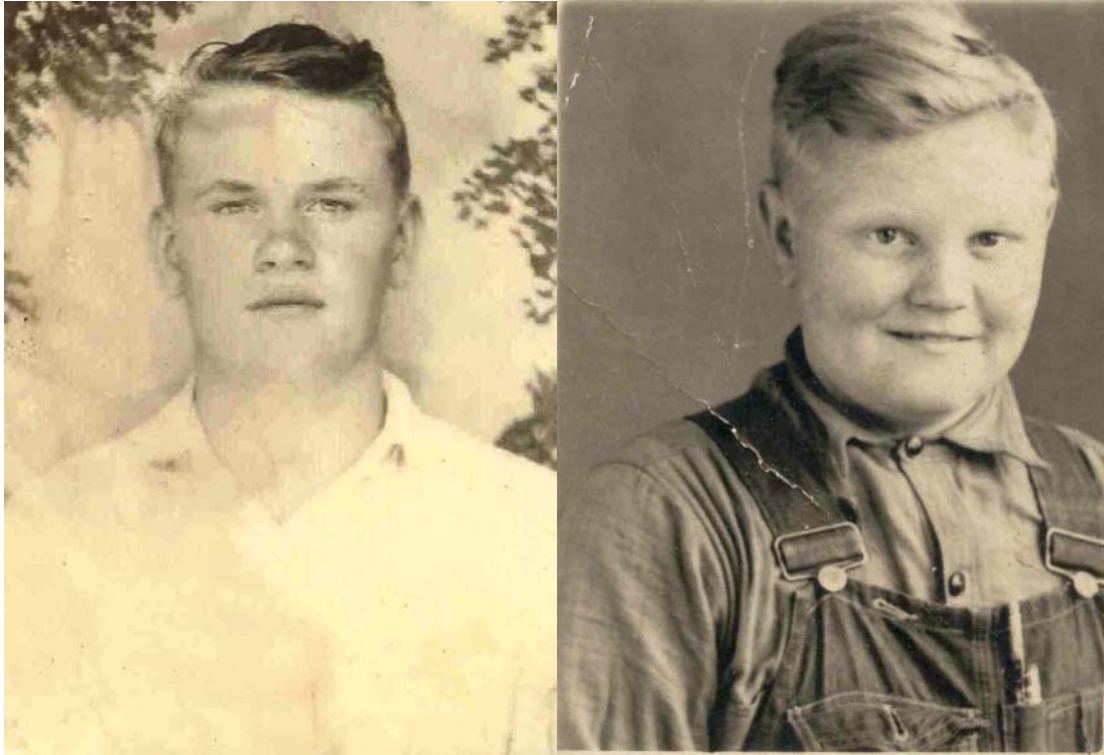
¹⁶³ Oley Smith, quoted by Harlan Edwards, 1.

Furman's swings. After each chop, Furman and Mit got more daring with the game, as both were confident Mit would be able to move his finger in time. Mit began to wait longer, and Furman to began swing faster. Finally, on one of Furman's downward strokes, his younger brother hesitated too long, and the axe fell down hard on Mit's finger. Crushed between the blade and the wood, Mit's finger was chopped off at the first joint. Horrified by what he had done to his younger brother, Furman came back home crying. Mit, ever the jokester, returned to the house laughing about his permanent injury. Dr. Peek soon bandaged Mit up, and Oley returned to the woods to retrieve Mit's lost fingertip still lying on the stump. The family saved it in a jar and eventually held a "funeral" service for the finger. They buried it beneath a circle of rocks on the Smith farm, and it became a constant reminder of Mit's impish ways.

Mit's appearance also made him seem much younger than his brother. Although they shared their father's sandy hair and blue eyes, he still had plenty of baby fat that gave him boyish cheeks. His mischievous smile further enhanced his youthful appearance. By contrast, Furman had grown taller and leaner; his face was slimmer and already taking the square-jawed appearance of a man. Furman's piercing eyes reflected his quiet self-assurance, appearing as if nothing would be too great a task. As Furman approached his teenage years, the duty of his family farm would require him to grow up fast. As a young man, Furman never used foul language or drank.¹⁶⁴ Because of his sacrifice, his sisters could continue in school. They were aware of Furman's value to the

¹⁶⁴ Essie Mae Merck, phone interview, 6 March 2009.

family. His oldest sister Essie Mae recalled, “He was the one [we] depended upon.”¹⁶⁵ By the time he was drafted at age 18, Furman had already been well-schooled in responsibility.



Furman and Mit, shortly before taking charge of the family farm, approximately 1937¹⁶⁶

Furman’s Father, a Noble Patriarch, 1909-1915

Although Furman and Mit accepted a heavy burden, their father provided an excellent example of leadership. Like his sons, Charlie had responsibility thrust upon him at an early age. When Charlie was 25, his father Oliver (Furman’s grandfather) was

¹⁶⁵ Essie Mae Smith, quoted in Jim Clark *Red, White, and Blue*, supplement to the *Pickens Sentinel*, “Meet Me in Heaven,” 2 July 1980, page 1.

¹⁶⁶ Photo is from the Taylor Family Archives.

chasing a hawk when he tripped over a log and accidentally shot himself. The tragic death left Charlie's four younger brothers and three sisters without their main breadwinner. With his older brother Robert already married, Charlie was the eldest single male in the Smith family and was probably the most capable of looking after a family. However, he was also approaching the age for marriage. Ideally, he should be starting a family of his own, not taking on his younger siblings as dependants. Nevertheless, Charlie would not abandon them. Rather than pursuing love interests, Charlie accepted his responsibility as a patriarch. He sold his farm to his older brother and moved back onto the 80-acre farm acquired by Reuben to care for his younger siblings (only to lose this land to the government 23 years later).¹⁶⁷

Charlie had assumed a big responsibility, but he was a big man. Physically, he was a massive figure. His six-foot two-inches in height looked even larger due to his wide frame that made him well over 200 pounds. By comparison, the football team for nearby Clemson College rarely listed a man over 200 pounds on their starting roster. The school had started playing football in 1896, and it was not until 1937 that two men over 200 pounds were listed in the starting eleven.¹⁶⁸ Larger than most of his peers, Charlie certainly looked like the grandson of a bare-knuckle fighter. He would be a physical presence for his younger siblings as well as for Furman and Mit years later.

While his build was intimidating, Charlie's demeanor did not match the aggressiveness that his boxing heritage would suggest. Charlie had patience,

¹⁶⁷ Pickens County Registrar of Deeds (Pickens, SC), 20 December 1915, book UU, 210

¹⁶⁸ Tim Bourett, *2008 Clemson Football Media Guide Supplement*, available online, <http://www.clemsontigers.com>, 132-33.

understanding, and resolve. Regarding his family, he was deeply religious and caring. Charlie was also literate, a trait that he shared with his younger siblings and his grandfather Reuben. His father Oliver and older brother Robert had been unable to read and write.¹⁶⁹ Although he was just 25 when his father died, Charlie was ready to serve as the patriarch to his three sisters and four younger brothers.

One by one, Charlie's sisters reached marriageable age and left the old Smith farm, but Charlie remained. When the last of his sisters married, Charlie finally decided to seek a wife. He set his sights on Oley Merck. According to a family story, Oley's father realized something was amiss when he caught Charlie walking his daughter home one day. John Thomas stated to his wife Eller, "I saw Oley walking today with that Big Ole Smith boy."¹⁷⁰ His suspicions proved to be well-founded; Charlie married the 19-year-old Oley in 1915. The 32-year-old Charlie had already proven himself as a capable patriarch and would become a tower of guidance for his future children.

¹⁶⁹ This information comes from various census data.

¹⁷⁰ Wayne Taylor, personal interview, 20 December 2008.



Charlie Smith and Oley Merck wedding pictures, 1915

The Merck Family, 1480-1915

Although Furman's father's side had deep roots in Pickens County, his mother's family history was embedded even deeper. Oley was from the fifth generation of Mercks to live along Six Mile Creek. They were originally an old German family, dating back to the Middle Ages. Family historians have traced their oldest ancestor to Anton (born 1480 in Rupboden, Germany). The German Mercks were prominent individuals, serving as bailiffs, tax collectors, and coopers. Friedrich Jacob Merck (a brother of Oley's ancestor)

purchased a pharmacy in 1668, which eventually became Merck KGaA, the oldest pharmaceutical company in the world.¹⁷¹

By the 18th Century, Oley's branch of the family wanted to improve their lives by emigrating to the New World. The first Merck to make the journey was Johann Balthasar "Balker" (Furman's fifth great grandfather). In 1764, the 46-year-old German immigrant arrived in Charlestown, South Carolina on the Ship Union. The Union was one of three vessels that arrived from London carrying families from the Rhineland area of Germany. King George III of Great Britain granted each male a tract of land according to the size of his family.¹⁷² Balker received 400 acres of land along Hard Labor Creek, near present-day Greenwood, South Carolina. His 16-year-old son Johann "Conrad" also received 100 acres.

Twelve years later, the Revolutionary War would tear the Merck family apart. Many German families in the area became loyalist, as a tribute to King George III who had granted the colonist their land.¹⁷³ Conrad and a number of his siblings would remain loyal to the crown, but their father Balker would side with the patriots. After an American victory, Conrad lost his landholdings and moved to Nova Scotia, Canada in order to receive reimbursement from the crown. This split would spread the Merck name in Canada as well. Conrad would return to South Carolina prior to the turn of the 19th Century, but his relationship with his father was forever shattered, as Balker wrote his oldest son out of his will.

¹⁷¹ "Merck Group History," available online, <http://pb.merck.de/servlet/PB/menu/1012970/>

¹⁷² Gordon A. Rampey. *Palatine Roots* (Warrenton, Virginia: G.A. Rampey, 1988), available online: <http://www.Upamerica.org/roots/roots1.html>

¹⁷³ Ibid.

Conrad's youngest son Daniel Nathaniel (Furman's third great grandfather) would begin the Mercks' Six Mile lineage. Daniel, his friend Joshua Chapman, and two others founded the area's first church in 1836, named Six Mile Baptist. Daniel donated land to establish the church, and Joshua served as one of its first pastors.¹⁷⁴ The Merck and the Chapman families would grow closer in following years, as Daniel's daughter Rachel would marry the pastor's son.

Unfortunately, Daniel's son Joseph (Furman's great great grandfather) would seriously mar the family reputation that his father had established. Joseph became a father at age 17 by the 29-year-old Susannah Chapman (likely Joseph's sister-in-law). The relationship with a woman 12 years his senior likely raised eyebrows, but nonetheless, the marriage resulted in several children. However, early legal troubles arose for a 20-year-old Joseph. In 1843, authorities arrested the 20-year-old Joseph for the murder of another man's slave. Daniel, along with their pastor Joshua Chapman, put up 500 dollars for Joseph's bail. The court found Joseph not guilty, but the family legend of the crime does not uphold Joseph's innocence. Despite this serious strike against his morality, Joseph would serve as the clerk of Six Mile Baptist from 1854-1863.

Joseph and his oldest son Israel (Furman's great grandfather) served in the Civil War. Israel was with the 12th South Carolina Infantry Regiment and in a number of battles, including Gettysburg. He was wounded on at least one occasion and was briefly a prisoner of war towards the end of the war. Joseph would have a far less honorable Civil War record than his son. Joseph served three months with the 1st South Carolina

¹⁷⁴ Clayton, F.V., *History of the Six Mile Baptist Church*, no publisher credited, 9.

State Troops, but was never paid. He was called to duty two more times before the end of the war, but Joseph never reported.

After the Civil War, debts weighed on Joseph. A court order in 1869 called for him to pay 122 dollars to W.E. Holcombe, which he did. Soon after, Joseph skipped town with a new bride closer to his own age, 33-year-old Nancy Trammel. His former wife Susannah was left behind with the couple's children. Rumors abound that prior to leaving town, Joseph convinced his in-laws to sell their land. Keeping the money from the sale, Joseph abandoned everyone for his new life. By 1870, the couple were living in Tennessee, but Joseph's womanizing ways were not over. Ten years later, the 67-year-old Joseph would leave his second wife to live in North Carolina with a new 35-year-old wife—Sara Ann Blazer.

Joseph's first-born Israel would remain in South Carolina and continue that branch of the family lineage. The Civil War veteran would pass on in 1928 when Furman was three-years-old. Israel's oldest son John Thomas (Furman's grandfather) would prove to be an industrious individual. His German heritage or perhaps the debacle of Joseph made J.T. primarily interested in business ventures rather than frivolous hobbies. He would restore the Mercks to the landholding status that they had enjoyed under his great grandfather Daniel. He was a stern, business-oriented patriarch and passed on this attitude to his daughter Oley.

Oley and Charlie as Parents

While his father provided Furman with a prime example of leadership, Furman also had a rare confrontational side that stemmed from his mother. Oley shared her husband's deep love for their family, hard work, and religion, but she was a stern disciplinarian, and children knew they had to "walk the line" around Oley.¹⁷⁵ Oley was more demanding than her laid-back husband, but others commented that she had to be stern or the soft-hearted Charlie would have given everything they owned away.¹⁷⁶ His softer side often created humorous contrasts with Oley's firmer approach to childrearing. As Charlie worked, he would sing secular songs to pass the time. Oley, who was officially opposed to non-religious songs, sometimes did not care for Charlie's selections.¹⁷⁷ According to a family story, Charlie was singing "Green Grass Grows Bonny," which was a song that made suggestions towards womanizing:

I can love light, lover, I can love strong.
I can love an old sweetheart 'til a new one comes along.
I can say that I love her for to give her heart ease.
Or I can turn my back on her and love who I please.

While Charlie was proud of his self-alleged promiscuity, Oley did not approve. She scolded her out-of-line husband, "Charlie, you shouldn't sing such songs in front of these youngins."¹⁷⁸ Despite her disapproval, the "youngins" would snicker, siding with the supposedly licentious Charlie. Wayne Taylor summarized, "Charlie liked to have a good

¹⁷⁵ Nora Stephens, personal interview, 3 January 2009.

¹⁷⁶ Eleanor Smith and Nancy McJunkin, personal interview, 3 June 2009.

¹⁷⁷ Oley did play non-religious songs such as "Old Suzanna" on the harmonica.

¹⁷⁸ Wayne Taylor, personal interview, 20 December 2008.

time. Oley liked to make sure that in having a good time—all the proper rules were followed.”¹⁷⁹

The touching relationship between Furman’s parents can also be revealed from a family photo. In their later years, the couple was posing for a picture in front of a tree. Charlie was holding an axe as his wife stood beside him. Prior to the picture being taken, son-in-law Ed McCall told Charlie to “act like you’re gonna hit her with the axe!” In response, Charlie raised the handle end of his tool as if he was going to comply with the violent request. When Charlie did, Oley quickly raised up a wooden stick as if she was about to strike back at Charlie.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.



Furman's parents, Oley and Charlie Smith, early 1950s ¹⁸¹

These actions by the longtime married couple reflect endearing aspects of their personalities. Charlie, who loved to joke, knew that onlookers would find humor in the audacity of him even pretending to strike his beloved wife. On the other hand, Oley was not one to take a beating—even if a make-believe one. Despite Charlie's overwhelming size, she had a fighter's mentality that was willing to strike back against a much larger foe. Smiles on both Charlie and Oley's faces suggest that the couple cherished each other.

¹⁸¹ This photograph is from the Taylor Family Archives.

Furman's parents were two figures that could show him how to deal with adversity. Together, they had battled through influenza, the death of their first-born, the Great Depression, natural disasters, and the loss of their farm. They had raised only one child to adulthood, but had already endured an almost unbearable amount of hardships. On the eve of World War II, even greater tragedies loomed on the horizon, but they were resilient, farming people.

Furman would inherit other traits from his parents. His sense of humor came from his father, which endeared him to his fellow soldiers. From his mother, Furman inherited a backbone that would not allow others to push him around. Despite his relative reserve in unfamiliar social situations, Furman was not easily intimidated. If he felt the need, he could be confrontational. A childhood friend recalled that Furman would reprimand other boys whenever they used bad language around women.¹⁸² On another occasion, a group of girls started snickering at Furman as he whispered something to Eleanor, his sister-in-law. Not wanting them to think something inappropriate of him, Furman quickly stopped the girls' gossip, saying, "That's my sister!"¹⁸³ He was quiet, but hardly timid; he was willing to stand alone against the group to protect his family. "He knew no fear when his [siblings'] safety was threatened," recalled his father.¹⁸⁴ This tenaciousness he developed from his mother would become ever-apparent years later in Italy.

¹⁸² Nora Youngblood Smith, phone interview, 30 May 2009

¹⁸³ Eleanor Smith, personal interview, 8 June 2009.

¹⁸⁴ Charlie Smith, quoted by Harlan Edwards, 1.

Furman on the Farm, 1937-1943

Twenty-five years after their marriage, Charlie's and Oley's household had grown to nine members. Furman and Mit took up the obligation of the farm as their five sisters continued in school. While the Smiths were not a wealthy family, they were never in danger of starving. Later in life, Furman's older sister Ethel would often say before Sunday dinner, "I may have been poor. But I have never had a time in my life, when I didn't have supper on the table and could have as much as I wanted to eat."¹⁸⁵ Ethel's claim that the Smiths always had plenty of food is a testament to the family's aptitude and temperance. "What I remember is how disciplined the family was and how creative and inventive," recalled Leroy Stewart.¹⁸⁶

The major cash crops of the farm were corn and cotton, as was true for all in the Six Mile area. Local farmers would sell their cotton at the nearby Stewart's Gin, while their corn was processed at any of several corn mills. Although cotton and corn were the major moneymakers, wheat was also a crop that could turn a buck, and it was ground at a roller mill in Central.¹⁸⁷ Occasionally, a market for a certain crop, such as peas, would develop and families would start growing that to meet the demand. Six Mile farmers would grow anything that would sell.¹⁸⁸ With their limited cash, families would buy clothing, manufactured goods, and whatever else they needed to survive the winter.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ This quote is recalled by the author as the speaker was his grandmother.

¹⁸⁶ Leroy Stewart, personal interview, 29 January 2009.

¹⁸⁷ Mary Ann Hendricks, personal interview, 30 May 2009.

¹⁸⁸ Leroy Stewart, personal interview, 29 January 2009.

¹⁸⁹ Nora Youngblood Smith, personal interview, 30 May 2009

According to Leroy Stewart, a long-time Six Mile resident, 40 acres was enough land to support a family. With 40 acres, small farmers could divide their land between cash crops and produce for the family's consumption. As a rule of thumb, cash crops like cotton and corn would take about 25 acres. Cotton generally received the larger portion. Five acres would be used for wheat, as grain was needed to make flour. The remaining 15 acres would be used for a produce garden that contained a variety of crops. Peas, tomatoes, sugar cane, and anything the family consumed on a daily basis would be grown on the remaining acres, as well as anything needed for animal feed.¹⁹⁰

Although Furman and Mit were in charge of plowing the fields, maintaining the family's livelihood was an all-encompassing effort. On an ideal Six Mile farm, the boys would take the most physically demanding jobs such as plowing and maintaining the livestock, while the girls would help during harvest. However, the Smith clan had an uneven number of girls with two sons and five daughters. Therefore, Furman's sisters were required to do much of the farm work as well, such as hoeing cotton and shucking corn. Six Mile women working in the fields was a common occurrence. In tougher situations, it was not unusual to see a woman plowing. "I knew some women that could plow as much as a man," recalled Edward Jewel.¹⁹¹

Farm work was a tough chore, and it failed to make the Smiths wealthy. But if there was an advantage to farm life, it was the food. Their produce garden provided for most of their needs from fresh produce to syrup. Fresh tomatoes, peas, cabbage,

¹⁹⁰ Leroy Stewart, personal interview, 29 January 2008.

¹⁹¹ Maj. Edward Jewell, personal interview, 30 May 2009.

cucumbers, and “anything you could mention” was in the produce garden.¹⁹² Domestic efforts by Furman’s mother and sisters ensured a diverse diet year round. Canning preserved these vegetables and jellies for the winter months. The Smiths also utilized a “cold frame,” which was a method of starting plants earlier than their normal season. The process called for crops to be started inside the house to protect them from late frosts and other harsh weather. Soon after they sprouted, they would be transported outside and placed in a pit to protect them further from the elements.¹⁹³

With their industriousness and preparation, the Smiths provided for most of their needs on the farm. This self-sufficiency meant they had little goods to buy. In addition, they took great care of the few manufactured materials that they did own. Leroy Stewart recalled, “If something could be made then the Smiths could maintain it, repair it, and keep it working.”¹⁹⁴

Self-sufficiency was not a luxury that all farmers enjoyed. Less ambitious families who did not utilize the cold-frame and canning could be restricted to “meat and potato” meals during the winter months.¹⁹⁵ Furthermore, a lazy father could also place a heavy burden on his family. With his children to work the fields, he could spend his days socializing in Six Mile without contributing to the family effort. These lethargic patriarchs would strain the family’s finances.¹⁹⁶ By contrast, Furman’s father Charlie remained a driven individual despite nagging pains from his bout with influenza. As his sons maintained the field and his daughters kept up with domestic responsibilities,

¹⁹² Nora Youngblood, personal interview, 30 May 2009.

¹⁹³ Leroy Stewart, personal interview, 29 January 2009.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Nora Youngblood Smith, phone interview, 23 March 2009

Charlie worked a number of wage jobs. Throughout his lifetime, he held positions as a miller, a sawmill worker, a night watchman at the Issaqueena Project, and a foreman on the Works Project Administration. Even Furman held a short-term wage job in his later teens. In the early 1940s, the Rural Electrification Administration began making preparations to install electricity to the area. The REA employed Furman for a few weeks, and he used a team of horses to drag downed tree logs to the road where they could be loaded and hauled away.¹⁹⁷ At the time, there were few opportunities for wage jobs, and ambitious farmers like the Smiths readily took any that became available.¹⁹⁸

With Furman and Mit minding the farm, his sisters' domestic efforts, and Charlie's wage earning, the Smith family proved to be an efficient enterprise. The demands of farm life made Furman accustomed to cooperative, strenuous work from an early age. By the time he entered the service, Furman already knew the value of laboring together.

¹⁹⁷ Major Edward Jewel, phone interview, 30 May 2009.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.



The Smith Farm, 1937-1955¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ Illustration by Wayne Taylor.

Recreation for Furman

Although work in the fields was a heavy commitment, Furman did have some time for pleasure. On rainy days, Furman and Mit would often use the free time to socialize, visiting their older brother Homer and his wife Eleanor.²⁰⁰ All three brothers shared a bond as farmers. Each lacked their father's height, but none of them was small. Furman was stout and the best looking, where Mit was a bit chubby.²⁰¹ The oldest brother was even more robust than Mit and affectionately called "Big Boy" by Furman.²⁰² Seven years older than Furman, Homer's age and dark hair set him apart from his younger brothers.

Ironically, Furman, who would later become the only brother to serve in World War II, was the least accomplished swimmer of the three. Once when they were swimming, Furman cautiously let his two brothers go out in the water to test its depth. Mit and Homer jumped in and quickly discovered that the water was over their heads. Rather than let Furman know the water was treacherous, the two brothers decided to pull a trick on their trusting sibling. Treading the water with their shoulders just above the surface, they told Furman that they were touching bottom and it was safe for him to go in. Foolishly trusting his brothers, Furman jumped in and the rushing water quickly took him under. Mit and Homer's joke went a bit farther than they intended, and they had to pull Furman out to keep him from drowning.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Eleanor Smith, personal interview, 12 December 2008.

²⁰¹ Mary Ann Hendricks, phone interview, 18 February 2009.

²⁰² Eleanor Smith, phone interview, 25 November 2008

²⁰³ Eleanor Smith, personal interview, 3 June 2009.

On weekends, Furman and other boys from the community would meet at a swimming hole in Six Mile Creek. These boys Furman had known since childhood, as they all had attended King's Grammar School together as children.²⁰⁴ The swimming hole was conveniently located less than a quarter mile from the Smiths' farmhouse on the backside of their property. Despite being a creek, its depth was often above a man's head. Rolling down from the center of Pickens County, the water of Six Mile Creek remained cold throughout the year, but it offered a pleasant contrast to the humid heat of the Carolina summers. Not owning proper swimming attire, the boys swam naked in the chilly water.²⁰⁵ Adding to the exhilaration, they used a rope swing to hurl themselves through the air before splashing into the water.²⁰⁶ The swimming hole's depth also contained a variety of freshwater fish, which made fishing another way to pass the time.

On one of his last days before leaving for the draft, several boys from the King's Grove area got together to wish Furman off. They intended on enjoying a relaxing day as they had done before, but this time a thunderstorm ominously appeared. One bolt of lightning came crashing down and hit so powerfully that the boys thought they could feel the electricity jolt through the water. Despite their good intentions, the downpour dampened the farewell party, as they had to wait for the storm to subside.²⁰⁷

Hunting was another hobby for Furman, who used the family's single-barrel shotgun. Although the breech-loading 12-gauge was primitive, Furman proved to be effective with it. Hunting squirrels and rabbits, Furman often returned from hunts with a

²⁰⁴ Lloyd Hendricks, personal interview, 8 June 2009.

²⁰⁵ Wilton Stephens, personal interview, 3 January 2009.

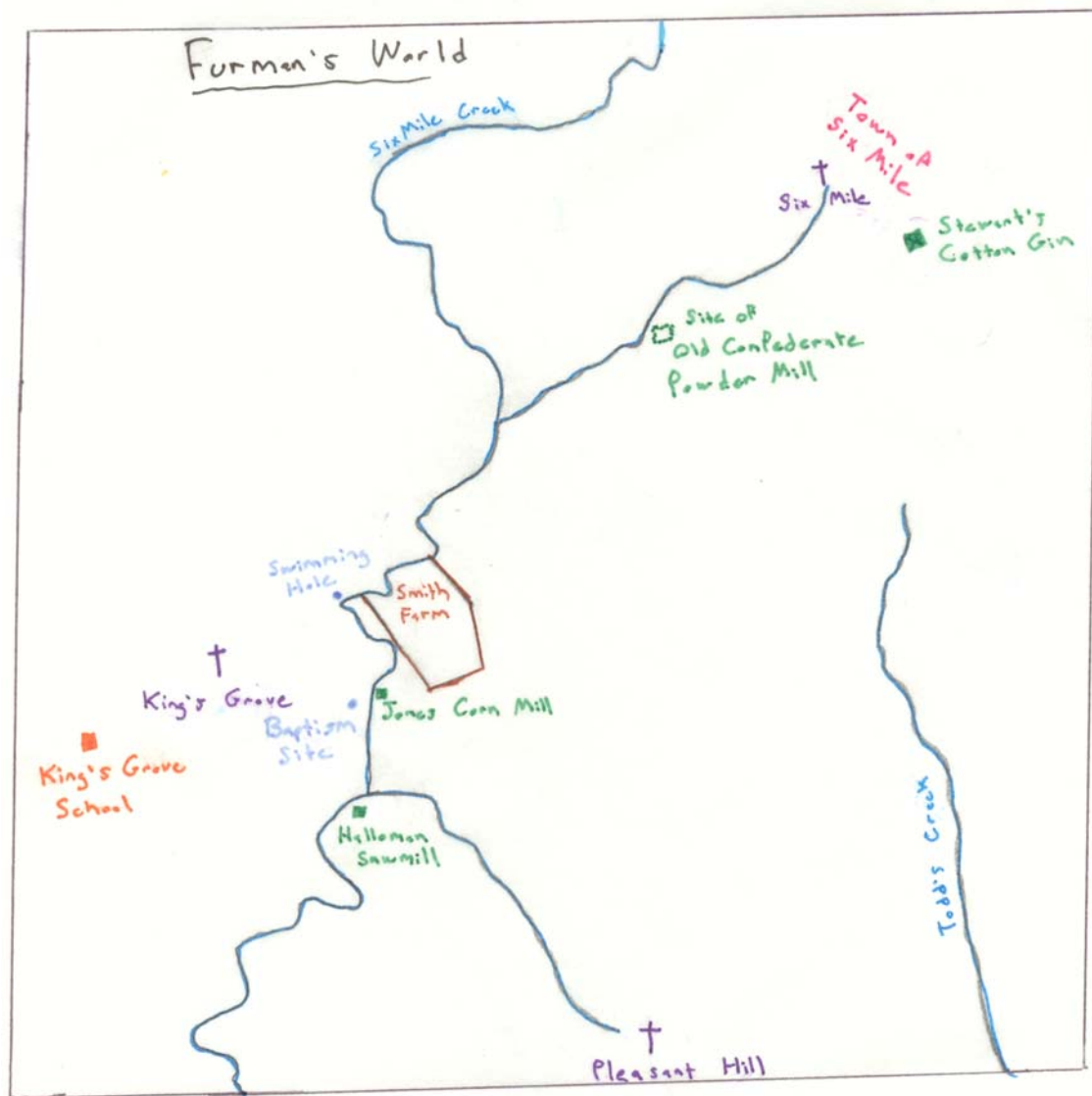
²⁰⁶ Lloyd Hendricks, personal interview, 8 June 2009.

²⁰⁷ Grady Smith, phone interview, 18 January 2009.

sack full of game.²⁰⁸ When Furman went off to basic training, his father began saving shotgun shells for him so he could hunt liberally when he returned. During his week-long furlough after basic training, Furman did just that. Gone for a day of hunting, Furman returned home with a “poke” (colloquial for sack) full of rabbits. He told his father that he would go out the next day and do the same thing. “He had a good eye, that boy did,” proudly stated his father.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ Bill Holder, phone interview, 11 January 2009.

²⁰⁹ Charlie Smith, quoted by Harlan Edwards, 1.



Important Landmarks of Furman's World, 1937-1943²¹⁰

²¹⁰ Illustration by author.

Importance of Church in the Six Mile Community

Aside from swimming, hunting, and fishing, church was the center of Furman's social life. Founded in 1910, King's Grove Church was just a mile from the Smiths' farm and was comprised of a God-fearing congregation, who demanded a strict moral code. In its early days, the church would not allow bootleggers to be laid to rest in the graveyard and instead buried them in the woods.²¹¹ As a social function, it also provided the community with much more than spiritual guidance. For many, the church was the only opportunity to meet others locally. King's Grove member Mary Ann Hendricks summed up the simple life of Six Mile people, "We had the farm, and we had the church, and that was it."²¹² Because of the church's importance as a social center, even non-religious people considered themselves as a part of their local church community.²¹³ The people of Six Mile identified with their church as much as they did their town or state.

King's Grove's pastor fit the church's strict style. From a family of preachers, Reverend Roy Murphree catered to lovers of traditional sermons with his strict doctrinal style.²¹⁴ Furman and Reverend Murphree shared a birthday on May 11, and as Furman grew older the two developed a bond. Later, when he was in the Army, Furman would send Reverend Murphree cash in his letters home.²¹⁵ The pastor had been born into a creek farming community himself and could easily relate to the families of Six Mile Creek.²¹⁶

²¹¹ David Hendricks, 2 January 2009.

²¹² Mary Ann Hendricks, phone interview, 30 May 2009.

²¹³ Maj. Edward Jewel, phone interview, 30 May 2009.

²¹⁴ *King's Grove Baptist Church*, 82.

²¹⁵ Harlan Edwards, 1.

²¹⁶ *King's Grove Baptist Church*, 82.

The pastor's authoritarian approach suited the Smith family. Furman's parents were godly individuals who believed in sobriety and temperance. An enthusiastic participant, Charlie sat in the "amen" corner, which was arranged on the left side of the pulpit, and he would zealously commend Reverend Murphree's sermons.²¹⁷ Furman's sisters, with the exception of the eldest Essie Mae, would sing hymns before the congregation.²¹⁸ The family maintained their religious nature throughout their lives. After World War II, Charlie and Homer would become deacons and Sunday school teachers at King's Grove. In the 100-year history of King's Grove Church, Charlie remains one of only three deacons who served until his death.²¹⁹ Furman shared his family's piety. "He was a good Christian boy," stated his mother.²²⁰

The social event of the year was revival week, which occurred in August when there was more free time on the farms. During the revivals, a swarm of people from all over the Six Mile area would join for a week of baptisms, testimonies, hymns, prayers, and sermons. All three Baptist churches in the area (Pleasant Hill, Six Mile, and King's Grove) would plan their revivals on different weeks so that members from each congregation could attend.²²¹ Even schoolchildren were marched single file to the church for morning services. It was an enjoyable experience.²²²

Religion was important to Furman. He had regularly attended church his entire life and always practiced good faith in his daily life. Yet he decided to take his devout

²¹⁷ *King's Grove Baptist Church*, 15.

²¹⁸ David Hendricks, phone interview, 24 December 2008

²¹⁹ *King's Grove Baptist Church*, 97.

²²⁰ Oley Smith, quoted by Harlan Edwards, 1.

²²¹ *King's Grove Baptist Church*, 22.

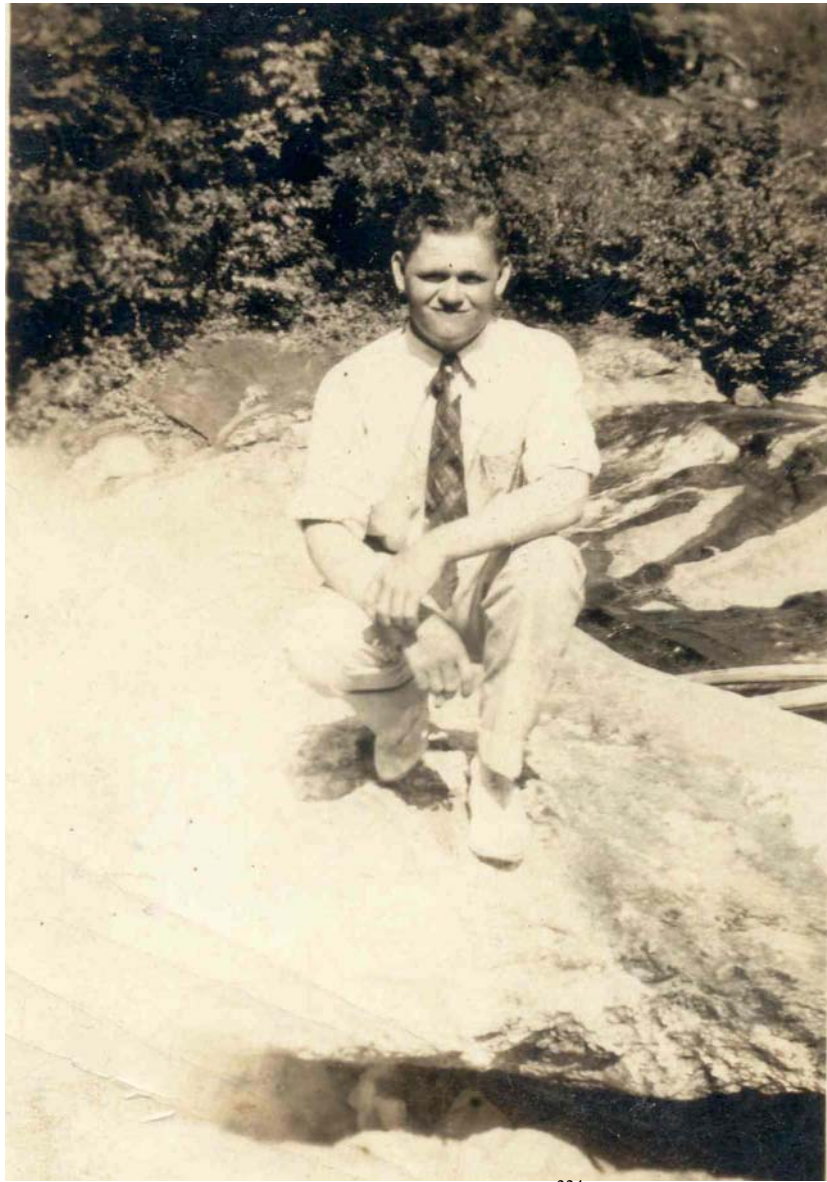
²²² Nora Youngblood Smith, phone interview, 30 May 2009

nature a step further. On May 11, 1943, Furman had his 18th birthday and became eligible for the draft. He could be torn away from the life that he had known. At this critical moment shortly before he was drafted, Furman was baptized and became an official member of King's Grove Baptist Church.²²³

King's Grove held baptisms at the shoals on Six Mile Creek. The secluded area was a tranquil place where the creek ran over a series of rock formations. It was farther down the creek from where Furman and his friends swam on weekends, but it was just as close to the Smith farm. It was a beautiful nature venue and perfect for country baptisms. Large gaps between the rocks created several pools that made excellent wading areas. The cool creek water came up about chest high. Sand at the bottom made walking in the pools comfortable, even soothing on bare feet. Flat rock surfaces on the banks allowed one to bask in the sunlight if he or she chose not to swim. One boulder jutted out over the deepest pool at the bottom, which brave individuals could use to jump into a narrow spot that was over six feet deep. The surrounding trees and sound of the water as it rushed over the rocks enhanced the solitude and peacefulness of the venue.

After the baptism, everyone went back to their houses and got dressed for pictures. Furman put on a white dress shirt, khaki pants, and a tie. Kneeling down on the rocks, Furman posed for a photograph to commemorate the event. For a family and a community that held such deep religious beliefs, Furman's baptism was a critical moment. Should the worst occur, and Furman not return home from war, he would die a Christian and be granted eternal salvation.

²²³ *King's Grove Baptist Church*, 22.



Furman at his baptism, 1943²²⁴

The connection of church created a kinship between the spiritual Smiths and others in their community. “That was one of the sweetest families that came to our church. They were precious people,” recalled Mary Ann Hendricks.²²⁵ Members of King’s Grove were willing to reach out to them if ever they needed assistance. Later

²²⁴ Photo is from the Taylor Family Archives.

²²⁵ Mary Ann Hendricks, phone interview, 30 May 2009.

when Furman was in the war, the Smith family was not alone in grief; the entire community was there for support, hoping their soldier would return home.

Aleen Rampey

The Smiths maintained their devout nature outside of church and would often host prayer meetings at their house.²²⁶ At these Sunday evening gatherings, different preachers joined with the Smiths, and the homey atmosphere allowed for intimate moments of worship. These gatherings at the Smith house were practically enthusiastic, as neighbors could hear the group shouting praises from a mile away.²²⁷

There was one prayer meeting that Furman was glad he attended. A vibrant preacher named Grayden Rampey led the Smiths in worship, although it was not his sermon that interested Furman. Instead, Furman took notice of the reverend's daughter Aleen. Four years younger than Furman, Aleen was a comely girl whose most striking feature was her auburn hair. She kept it shoulder length and combed it back neatly to show her face, which was feminine despite light acne that revealed her youth. She also had attractive, bright eyes which fit her energetic personality. Aleen even shared the Smiths' passion for religion and music. Her family was fortunate enough to own a piano, and she loved to sing as her mother played songs. Furman might have considered that Aleen could get along well with his sisters, who also liked to sing in church.

To the outsider, it might be difficult to imagine that Furman would have a chance with Aleen. The daughter of a pastor, beautiful, and musical, Aleen would have likely

²²⁶ David Hendricks, phone interview, 24 December 2008.

²²⁷ Ibid.

had her choice of a number of suitors. Aleen, as an only child, also had more opportunities than Furman. He did not even attend high school, and his family did not own their own land.

Yet Furman had other qualities that Aleen must have been drawn to. Despite a lack of education, he was intelligent. Despite his poor background, he was industrious. To the young girl, the hardworking Furman had rugged good looks. He, like his father, had been forced to care for his family at an early age and had already proven his worth as a leader. Yet despite his confidence and firm exterior, Furman was deeply passionate towards his home and his loved ones. Edward Jewell remembered that Furman would take time to joke with younger children. One time, Furman made the young Edward a whistle out of the branch of a poplar tree.²²⁸ It was a common practice that Furman did for children. He had inherited his father's kind soul, and the people of the community cherished him. Despite his humble background, Aleen found herself in love with Furman, but then again, so had everyone else in the community.

Fate Takes Its Course

For 18 years, this close-knit society on Six Mile Creek shaped Furman's development. Working on his family farm had not brought in much money, but it had made him a respectable young man full of character and values. With a devoted family, virtuous community, and lovely girlfriend, Furman could have happily lived out his life forever isolated in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Yet a great menace

²²⁸ Edward Jewell, phone interview, 30 May 2009.

thousands of miles away loomed imminently, unwilling to let Furman live out a peaceful existence. Soon he would have to answer the call of duty and leave his beloved world.

CHAPTER THREE

FURMAN'S STAND, 1944

Just ten months and three days after he entered the service, Furman would make the greatest decision of his young life and seriously jeopardize any return to his loved ones. On June 1, 1944, General Mark Clark's Fifth Army was knocking on the gates of Rome. The Allies were 20 miles from capturing the first capital of the Axis powers. However, the Germans' efforts to defend the eternal city revealed that the fight was not over. Kesselring's Caesar Line had been battered, but not broken. Hoping to capture Rome prior to the pending invasion of France, General Clark had instructed his Fifth Army to make an all-out offensive.

On the outskirts of Lanuvio, Furman's Red Bull Division had responded dutifully to their commander's orders. During the day's attack, his battalion had captured a portion of the Caesar Line and pushed forward another 800 yards, but the advance had left the men overextended. When a force of 80 Germans charged with a counterattack, the company received an order for retreat. Furman's company had reached safety with his squad heroically covering their escape. After nearly everyone had withdrawn, it appeared to be Furman's turn to flee, but he found himself unable to fall back to safety. During the melee, two of his non-commissioned officers, Staff Sergeant David Lopez and Sergeant Orval Houser, had been injured and remained on the battlefield.

Furman saw that he was the only man between his wounded comrades and the charging 80 Germans. Despite the danger, Furman would not run from the superior

German force. Making a stand appeared futile, but his retreat would also risk the deaths of Lopez and Houser. Furman was four thousand miles from home, but his principles had not changed. His friends needed help, and he was going to save them.

As the enemy force charged forward, both Lopez and Houser said they had lost all hope as they lay helpless on the battlefield.²²⁹ Furman, whose hope had not yet waned, grabbed the two wounded sergeants and carried them to an artillery shell hole where they would be safe from enemy fire. Lopez, the highest-ranking soldier of the three, pleaded with Furman to fall back and save himself.²³⁰ Disregarding orders once again, Furman denied his staff sergeant's request by giving a simple smile and patting his rifle, a standard-issue M1 Garand.²³¹ He then grabbed a few bandoleers (pocketed belts containing ammunition clips) and crawled his way to another shell hole, where he would draw fire away from Lopez and Houser.²³² From his new position, Furman prepared to hold off the German onslaught single-handed.

The wounded sergeants, Furman's retreated company, and even the commander for his entire battalion looked on as he stood alone against 80 Germans. In spite of the odds against him, Furman lifted his M1 and fired at the enemy ranks. The first German in the group tumbled to the ground, and Furman quickly aimed and fired again.²³³ He needed to be fast and precise, as a number of the enemy carried machine pistols. The machine pistol was fully automatic and had a distinctive noise. Capable of firing 15

²²⁹ Ellis Watkins, quoted in "Medal of Honor to Infantryman," 16 January 1945, Taylor Family Archives.

²³⁰ Fillmore Mearns, quoted in "Recommendation," Taylor Family Archives.

²³¹ Ellis Watkins, quoted in "Medal of Honor."

²³² "Death Casualty Biographies: 135th Infantry."

²³³ Homer Ankrum. *Dogfaces who Smiled through Tears: the 34th Red Bull Infantry Division in World War II* (Lake Mills, Iowa: Graphic Publishing, 1987), 509.

rounds per second, it made a cruel “burrpp” noise when the shooter unloaded at a target. “It delivered a load of fire,” recalled Colonel Richard Wilkinson.²³⁴ Its devastating firepower made the machine pistol one of Germany’s major advantages in weaponry.²³⁵ Furman held only his standard issue American M1.²³⁶

Undaunted in the face of overwhelming numbers, Furman unloaded clip after clip at the enemy.²³⁷ His furious barrage ceased only occasionally when he had to reload.²³⁸ The M1 allowed for eight shots before its clip discharged from the rifle and made its own distinctive sound. After every eighth pull of the trigger, Furman’s M1 would “ping,” sending the ejected clip flying into the air, and he had to load another clip quickly as the enemy advanced ever closer. Although it was heavier and lacked the firepower of the machine pistol, the M1 fired very accurately for a skilled marksman. “That M1 was a good gun,” recalled Lloyd Hendricks.²³⁹ Furman was confident in his proficiency with the weapon. The former farmboy had once bragged to an officer at basic training, “If I had a gun like this at home, there wouldn’t be a rabbit alive in Pickens County.”²⁴⁰

Now in warfare, Furman and his M1 were threatening to take out an entire unit of the enemy. The semi-automatic rifle allowed him to deliver a continuous stream of gunfire, and he proved to be deadly with it in his hands. As he fired into the German

²³⁴ Richard Wilkinson, phone interview, 4 June 2009.

²³⁵ Blumenson, 28.

²³⁶ One secondary source, Homer Ankrum’s book, mentions that Furman collected several guns and switched rifles during his stand. Although Ankrum gave no citation, his source is likely from the “Death Casualties Biographies” which were compiled from veteran’s memories at 34th Division reunions. This account of Furman’s heroics was collected years after World War II, and sources closer to the action (multiple affidavits from eyewitnesses and regimental histories) stress the fact that Furman used only his M1 rifle.

²³⁷ Fillmore Mearns, quoted in “Recommendation.”

²³⁸ “Death Casualty Biographies: 135th Infantry.”

²³⁹ Lloyd Hendricks, personal interview, 8 June 2009.

²⁴⁰ Joe Stewart, phone interview, 22 February 2009.

ranks, the men of Furman's company hurried to reorganize. Sergeant Donao Cardella recalled that he looked up at every spare moment to see Furman "squeezing off a shot with that M1 of his and a German hitting the ground."²⁴¹ In spite of the German's superior numbers, the solitary soldier momentarily halted the 80-man force. With their ranks thinned, the enemy unit became disorganized and gave Furman's company critical time to regroup. The commander of the 3rd Battalion, Fillmore Mearns, recalled, "[The Germans] seemed stunned, bewildered; unable to comprehend that a man from a nation they had been taught to believe soft and decadent could be so tough. For several glorious moments, Private Smith, a lone American doughboy, held these much vaunted members of the mighty Wehrmacht at bay."²⁴²

The scene was incredible. In defiance of what should have been a hopeless defeat, the area in front of Furman's shell hole became littered with dead and writhing wounded. The determined Private Smith killed ten of the enemy outright and injured many more.²⁴³

However, the reduced enemy force eventually rallied and reached the edge of Furman's shell hole. As they approached ever closer, Furman began shifting the barrel of his gun to fire left and right, taking out the closest enemy soldiers.²⁴⁴ Despite the heroic effort, the outcome of this one-man standoff became inevitable. One German soldier, at nearly point-blank range, finally fired his machine pistol into the dogged Private Smith. An entire clip from the feared "burp" gun unloaded into the lone American doughboy and

²⁴¹ Donao Cardella, quoted in "Medal of Honor."

²⁴² Fillmore Mearns, quoted in "Recommendation."

²⁴³ Homer Ankrum. *Dogfaces*, 509.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 509.

killed him instantly.²⁴⁵ Furman's body fell with his M1 pressed against his shoulder, and his finger still gripping its trigger as if he was about to fire another shot.²⁴⁶ Fearless to the end, Furman had fought to the last second.²⁴⁷

The company, energized by his furious stand, was able to withstand the German attack. "His courage was a tremendous inspiration to our company and enabled us to throw back the counterattack," said 1st Lieutenant William Pulliam.²⁴⁸ His valor had rejuvenated the battle-weary soldiers. The men of the company told themselves that "his death would not be in vain."²⁴⁹ Regrouped, the company retook the position and was able to rescue the two wounded comrades. When the men reached their fallen hero, they discovered that the barrel on Furman's gun had not yet cooled.²⁵⁰

Once reunited with his company, Lopez was able to give his comrades important information regarding the enemy's position and strength. For his actions that day, Lopez received the Distinguished Service Cross, the country's second highest military honor.²⁵¹ Furman had saved another hero. Perhaps as a greater reward, both Lopez and Houser were granted furloughs back to the United States.²⁵² They would survive the war; Furman's death had not been in vain. His comrade, William Pulliam, further explained the importance of Furman's stand, "The end was inevitable, we all knew that, including

²⁴⁵ Fillmore Mearns, quoted in "Recommendation."

²⁴⁶ John Pendergast, quoted in "Recommendation."

²⁴⁷ Fillmore Mearns, quoted in "Recommendation."

²⁴⁸ William Pulliam, quoted in "Recommendation."

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ John Pendergast, quoted in "Recommendation."

²⁵¹ "A Partial History, 135th Infantry Regiment," 33-34.

²⁵² V. P. Forbord, quoted in "Recommendation."

Private Smith. But when those that were left of the Germans rushed our position we beat them back. Next morning we attacked and destroyed the entire unit.”²⁵³

Furman’s prediction that his ride across the Atlantic would be a one-way trip became true. Ironically, the soldier, who once broke into tears when he was a few miles from home, bravely sacrificed his life half a world away. If not for the extreme carnage at Lanuvio, the landscape might have reminded him of his farm on Six Mile Creek. The terrain featured rolling hills of wheat and vineyards, which were complemented by Pastarella Creek. The agrarian scene was set in the Alban Hills, just as his hometown of Six Mile rested in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Southern historian Don Doyle has even stated that these two areas share cultural similarities.²⁵⁴ Southern Italy, like the American South, has its own nationalistic identity within the country and has had a history of ridicule from its northern neighbors. Furman probably did not realize these similarities, but regardless, his body gave up its ghost in a familiar place. He breathed his last breath next to a creek in the foothills of southern (Italian) farmland.

Closing to Rome, June 2-5, 1944

The day after Furman’s death, the Red Bulls continued their assault on the crumbling Caesar Line. The 100th Battalion came out of reserve and took over the 3rd Battalion’s advance.²⁵⁵ All along the Caesar Line, the Germans were retreating, and the outcome of the battle looked to be decided. The entire Allied front pushed the Germans

²⁵³ William Pulliam, quoted in “Medal of Honor.”

²⁵⁴ Don H. Doyle, *Nations Divided: America, Italy, and the Southern Question* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002).

²⁵⁵ Kenneth Maitlan Davies, *To the Last Man: the Chronicle of the 135th Infantry Regiment of Minnesota* (St. Paul: Ramsey County Historical Society, 1982), 131.

back as they no longer controlled their carefully prepared defensive positions. The enemy began using everything they could to mount a defense against the advancing Americans. They even threw tailors, bakers, and butchers into battle.²⁵⁶ The desperate move revealed that the line was on the verge of collapse. Eventually the Germans retreated as they saw little point in continuing the fight.²⁵⁷

The Allies had finally broken the Caesar Line and opened the gates to Rome. This great accomplishment had cost the life of a brave young soldier with a promising future, Private Smith. Yet many other soldiers would not return home from Lanuvio. Chester Starr, a historian of the Fifth Army, noted that “the ingenuity and craft of the Germans in defense were rarely better demonstrated than in the Battle of Lanuvio.”²⁵⁸ Death figures support his claim. Before encountering the Caesar Line, 102 soldiers from Furman’s 135th Regiment had died since he had joined the unit. Yet in just four days at Lanuvio, 71 soldiers from the regiment were killed in action. Even the regimental commander Ray Erickson died in the melee.²⁵⁹ Losses were extreme across the entire Red Bull Division. Leighton McKeithen often said that the 133rd Regiment experienced its toughest fighting at the rock quarry near Lanuvio.²⁶⁰ The Red Bulls would become familiar with gruesome battles throughout the rest of the war, having the highest number of casualties per capita of any division.²⁶¹ The Battle of Anzio receives most of the

²⁵⁶ Hougen, 86.

²⁵⁷ Starr, 255.

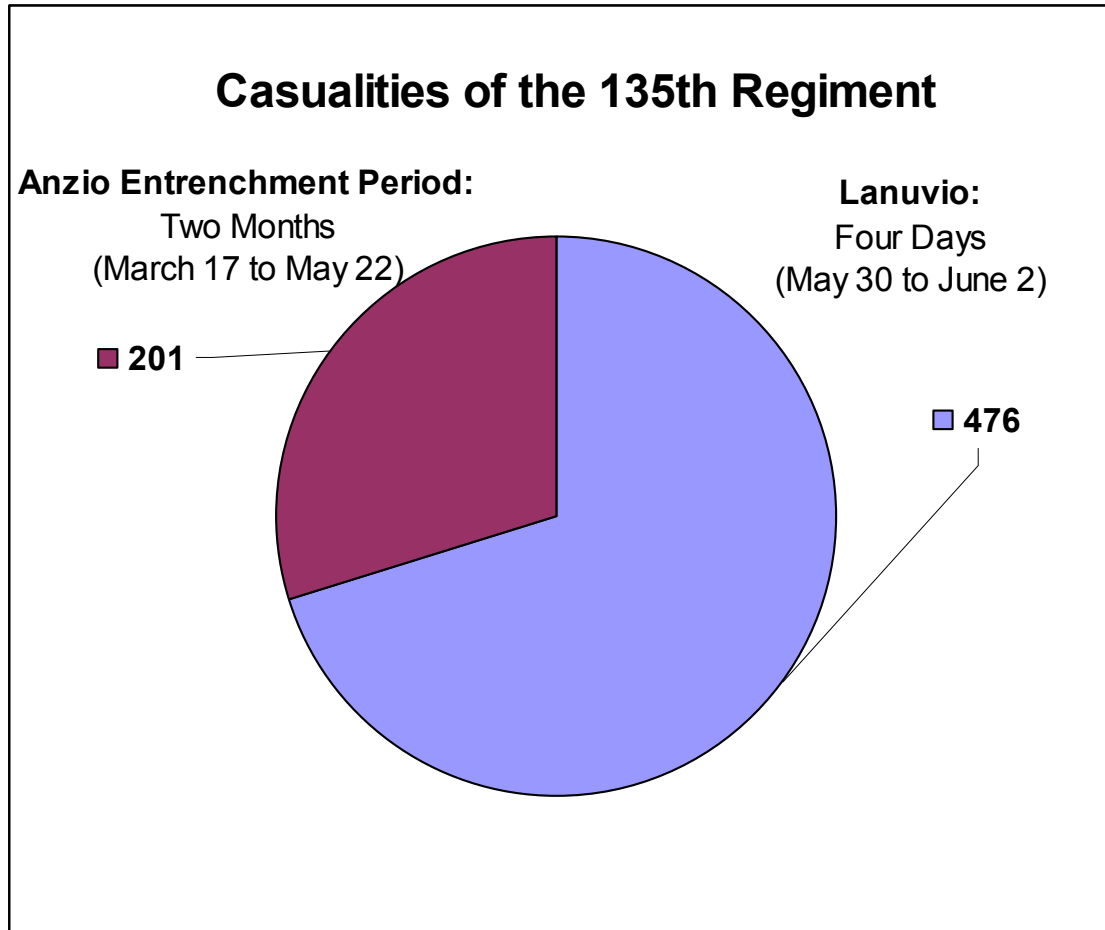
²⁵⁸ Starr, 246.

²⁵⁹ *135th Infantry Regiment*, Phase X.

²⁶⁰ Edna McKeithen, phone interview, 2 June 2008.

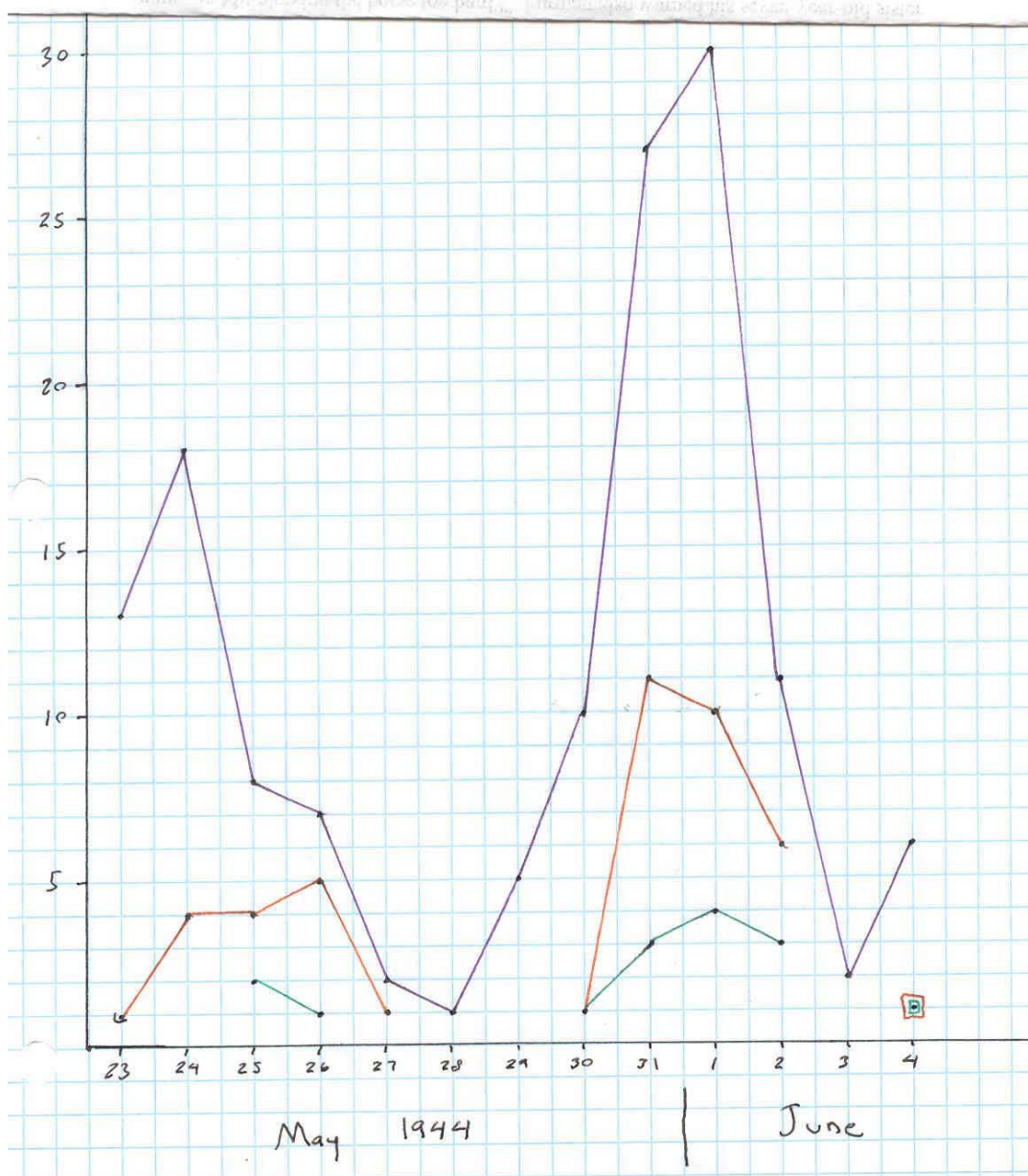
²⁶¹ Ankrum, 23.

attention in history books, but the losses sustained at Lanuvio were the heaviest of any engagement of the Red Bull Division.²⁶²



²⁶² Ibid., 23.

Death Casualties on the Drive to Rome (May 23-June 4)
 135th Infantry Regiment (purple)
 3rd Battalion (orange)
 Company L (green)



Death Casualties of 135th Infantry Regiment on the Drive to Rome: May 23-June 4, 1944²⁶³

²⁶³ Chart was compiled by the author using "Death Casualties List, 135th Regiment"

Two days after Furman's death, the German high command declared Rome an open city.²⁶⁴ The Germans would no longer contest its control, and the Italian capital would be spared from the urban warfare that had occurred in the Battle of Stalingrad. After so much doubt, General Clark's Americans would take the city. The only question was which of his men would have the honor of being the first.

A number of units claimed to be the first troops to enter Rome. Yet within the Red Bull Division, there is no dispute. Furman's 135th Regiment crossed the Tiber River prior to the 168th and 133rd Regiments. Marching through the eternal city was a thrilling experience for many Red Bulls. The people of Rome rushed into the streets to greet their liberators. Italian girls ran out to hug and kiss the battle-weary American soldiers. The young women were a welcome sight to the soldiers who had seen nothing but enemy fire for months. "I could speak Italian, so I had a great time," recalled a chuckling John Minotti. "I almost got married."²⁶⁵

Other Red Bull soldiers were thankful for a chance to rest. Thirteen days had passed since the breakout from Anzio. For nearly two weeks, they had been in constant battle and covered miles of territory. Sweaty, unshaven, and exhausted, Leighton McKeithen celebrated the capture of an Axis capital by laying down for a nap. When he awoke, he discovered his unit had moved on without him and some time passed before he could locate his comrades.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ *Anzio Beachhead: the breakthrough, 22 January – 25 May 1944*. (Washington: Center of Military History, 1990), available online, <http://www.history.army.mil/books/wwii/anziobeach/anzio-fm.htm>, 22.

²⁶⁵ John Minotti, personal interview, 16 July 2009.

²⁶⁶ Edna McKeithen, phone interview, 2 June 2009.

According to a chronicle of Furman's 135th Regiment, it was the first American unit to enter the ancient city.²⁶⁷ A number of other units would contest this claim, but it remains possible that the men who witnessed Furman's heroics could have been among the first troops in 1,500 years to enter Rome from the south.

The official honor went to the 1st Special Service Force, which accompanied General Clark to the center of Rome on June 5, 1944. As General Clark had hoped, newspapers back home praised the Americans for claiming the "great prize" of Italy. General Clark's soldiers marched through the ancient city, which Hannibal's men never did. However, the limelight would not last long. Less than 24 hours after General Clark walked up the steps of the Capitol, Allied forces landed on the beaches of Normandy, sparking the epic invasion known as D-Day.²⁶⁸ As the commander had predicted, the press instantly shifted their attention to the war in France. It was not uncommon for newspapers to print headlines such as "Allies capture Rome" on June 5, only to publish "Allies invade France" on June 6. While his moment in the sun was painfully brief, General Clark successfully accomplished what he had set out to do—liberate Rome prior to the invasion of France. Thanks in no small part to the Red Bull Division's efforts at Lanuvio, General Clark had made his mark on history.

A few weeks later in South Carolina, Furman's brother Homer and his wife Eleanor were working on a fence, attempting to repair it after a cow had escaped the day before. The extra chore came on a pretty day; the sun was out and the couple enjoyed the late spring warmth. But a chilling scene quickly brought an end to their pleasant day.

²⁶⁷ Davies, 132.

²⁶⁸ Jackson, 207.

Sensing a bad omen, Homer instantly stopped all his work and watched quietly as a solid black car drove down the dirt road. As it approached his father's place, Homer said to his wife, "Oh my, Furman's dead." A few minutes later, the two could hear the screams of Charlie and Oley coming from their house. Unable to control her emotions from the devastating news, Furman's mother walked up and down their dirt road wailing incoherently.²⁶⁹ Her beloved son would not be coming home.

The Italian Campaign would continue for another year after the liberation of Rome. As attention shifted to the Allied efforts in France, the Red Bull Division continued to fight the Germans in Italy. Throughout the war, the Red Bulls would see action over the entire length of Italy, from the invasion of Sicily to the edge of the Alps. Although Furman was no longer with the division, his comrades would never forget his valiant stand at Lanuvio. Allen McSween, the chaplain for the 3rd Battalion, wrote to Furman's family, "Numerous times after Furman's death the men of his company and [soldiers] throughout the whole battalion were reminded of his courageous act and it served as an inspiration to us all...he did not give his life in vain."²⁷⁰

General Mark Clark after the War

While Furman instantly became a hero to the men of the Red Bull Division, General Clark had a hard time finding similar praise. Even six decades after World War II, few figures polarize historians more than he. Scholar Rick Atkinson notes that even

²⁶⁹ Eleanor Smith, personal interview, 10 December 2008.

²⁷⁰ Allen McSween, "Letter to Smith Family," 4 October 1991, copy obtained from Nancy McJunkin, Taylor Family Archives.

the mention of his name still causes eyebrows to knit and lips to purse.²⁷¹ Much of his reputation stems from the decision that he made on May 25, 1944. On that day, he turned the majority of his VI Corps towards Rome and altered the orders of his superior General Alexander to continue to Valmontone. With that decision, General Clark cemented Furman's fate to make his stand at Lanuvio, but he also created a wealth of controversy for himself. There is little question that the allure of Rome affected General Clark's decision. Even he admitted, "I was determined that the Fifth Army was going to capture Rome and I probably was overly sensitive to indications that practically everybody else was trying to get into the act."²⁷² However, historians have hotly debated a number of other facets of General Clark. At nearly every point, he has had both avid supporters and harsh critics.

Some have argued that the capture of Rome was not vital to the campaign. Historian Lloyd Clark believed that conquering Rome was "poor compensation" for abandoning the opportunity to destroy the 10th Army.²⁷³ Yet most have understood General Clark's desire for the eternal city. Martin Blumenson contested, "The capture of Rome would show the American people back home, as no amount of 10th Army destruction would, tangible and dramatic evidence of American success in Italy after so much frustration."²⁷⁴

Many have also argued that General Clark simply made a poor military decision. While Blumenson acknowledged Rome's significance, he did note that the results of

²⁷¹ Atkinson, 428-29.

²⁷² Mark Clark, 284.

²⁷³ Lloyd Clark, 234.

²⁷⁴ Blumenson, 190.

General Clark's shift had few military gains. Several days after the maneuver, the VI Corps not only failed to entrap the 10th Army as General Alexander had hoped, but it was no closer to conquering Rome either.²⁷⁵ Ironically, General Clark's decision, which he implemented to get to Rome as quickly as possible, actually delayed his conquest of the city. However, not everyone has agreed with Blumenson's interpretation. James Holland reasoned that General Clark's course of action actually resulted in a greater destruction of the 10th Army than would have been possible if he had followed General Alexander's orders.²⁷⁶

For nearly every criticism, General Clark has supporters. Yet there remains one vice for which he finds little defense in the historical record. General Clark was a glory hound. He appeared to love playing the conquering hero in his press conferences, and this embellishment has created great resentment from his critics, particularly from those who feel the commander was a military buffoon. Above all else, this self-promotion has hurt the commander's reputation, as no historian has disputed his egotism.

Perhaps most revealing of General Clark's concern for his public image are two pictures from Anzio. The amphibious assault was a historic occasion, after all Operation Shingle was intended to be the Allies' breakthrough in the campaign. Both General Clark and General Alexander had photo opportunities during the initial Allied invasion of the beachhead. Despite this momentous event, the two commanders had strikingly different approaches to being photographed. In Alexander's picture, two officers are shown standing at the front of the boat, looking eager for the task at hand. Meanwhile,

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 194.

²⁷⁶ James Holland, *Italy's Sorrow* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008), 242-43.

Alexander is seated passively off to the side, as if not wanting to draw attention to himself. In his picture, Alexander looks more like a shy adolescent at a middle school dance rather than the commander of the Italian Campaign. By contrast, Clark is posed on one knee in his picture and leaning forward as if ready to storm the beachhead himself. Ironically, the lesser-commander Mark Clark displays an upright posture that is reminiscent of George Washington as he crossed the Delaware River.



General Alexander (left photo, on far left) and General Clark (right photo) on their way to Anzio²⁷⁷

Although General Dwight Eisenhower referred to Clark as “the best trainer, organizer, and planner I have ever met,” he was hardly George Washington.²⁷⁸ Because of his quest for glory, General Clark has found many enemies amongst historians. His deepest critics have even argued that he cared more about adding to his own grandeur than he cared about his own troops. One of these critics could argue that in Furman’s

²⁷⁷ Lloyd Clark, 104-105.

²⁷⁸ Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns, *The War: An Intimate History, 1941-1945* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 123.

case General Clark's decision on May 25 was made for his own glory. With no concern for his common soldier, Clark ultimately cost a young G.I. his life, sending him straight into the enemy's toughest defenses at Lanuvio. General Clark, however, still had one noble decision left to make that would affect Furman's fate, and this one would have no evidence of narcissism.

The Medal of Honor, 1944

Not long after the fighting at Lanuvio, Furman's comrades sought recognition for his glorious stand. His battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Mearns, spearheaded a recommendation for the Congressional Medal of Honor. Soldiers from Furman's company, William Pulliam and John Pendergast, also provided affidavits. Mearns had been a dogged soldier himself. A history of the 135th Regiment praised the commander's ability to inspire his troops at Lanuvio, "From the battalion commander Lt. Col. Mearns who was fighting shoulder to shoulder with his men down to the newest private, the entire third Battalion was determined if necessary to live up to their Regimental motto and fight 'to the last man.'"²⁷⁹

Mearns had shared the battlefield with many of his men and was also wounded on the same day as Furman. After Furman's stand, Mearns had refused to retreat from an advancing German tank and boldly fired at the enemy vehicle, despite return fire from its machine gun. A few of its rounds shattered the barrel of Mearns's gun, sending shards of metal flying towards him. Bleeding from the chest and face, the commander took a bullet

²⁷⁹ *135th Infantry Regiment*, phase X, page 23.

wound to his shoulder before he allowed medics to take him off the battlefield.²⁸⁰ A fearless leader, Mearns had his blood spilled on the same soil as Furman's.

There could not have been a better soldier to write Furman's recommendation. Mearns was an eyewitness, highly literate, and knew what a heroic soldier was like. After all, he was one. After battling alongside numerous gallant men and witnessing Furman's actions first hand, Mearns said of Furman, "He is worthy of being placed among the great fighting men produced by our Armed Forces."²⁸¹ According to Mearns, Furman was the 3rd Battalion's most noteworthy soldier on the critical battlefield of Lanuvio.

After reading the recommendation, however, a committee approved Furman for the Distinguished Service Cross instead. This award did not satisfy Furman's former comrades, and they prepared another citation for the Congressional Medal of Honor. The citation advanced through the ranks of the Fifth Army, with each commander approving Furman for the Medal of Honor before passing the file up to their superior. Finally, Furman's file reached the desk of General Mark Clark. The final approval was his, if he felt Furman deserved the higher award.²⁸² Clark's office requested more information about Furman's action. Two more affidavits from Sergeant Ellis Watkins and Staff Sergeant Donao Cardella provided further testimony to Furman's heroics. In an action he rarely did, General Clark overturned the ruling of the committee and approved Furman for the Medal of Honor.²⁸³

²⁸⁰ *135th Infantry Regiment*, phase X, page 23-24.

²⁸¹ Fillmore Mearns, quoted in "Recommendation."

²⁸² William Jonas, quoted in "Recommendation."

²⁸³ William C. Williams, "Letter to Myra Taylor," 28 June 1990, Taylor Family Archives.

The reason General Clark decided to go against the committee's initial ruling is a mystery. It is possible the citation reached Clark's desk, and an aide advised the general to approve the order. He could have signed without giving it a second thought. However, it is also conceivable that the date of Furman's death stood out to General Clark.²⁸⁴ It should have. Furman's heroic stand came when the conquest of Rome was still in question. After General Clark called for an all-out attack to break the Caesar Line, Furman had carried out his orders to the fullest. In the teeth of the toughest German defenses at Lanuvio, Furman had paid the ultimate price on the road to Rome. Had Clark's VI Corps not been composed of fighting men like Furman, the general might have shared the honor of liberating the Italian capital.

Regardless of General Clark's thought processes, his decision revealed that there was more to the commander's personality than the self-promoting glory hound. There were no photo opportunities or press conferences for awarding a posthumous Medal of Honor to Private Smith. Yet this act gave testament to one of his many soldiers who were responsible for the liberation of Rome and for making it a uniquely American accomplishment. It also showed a humble side to the Fifth Army commander. General Eisenhower had awarded Clark the Distinguished Service Cross. Yet Clark conceded that Furman deserved the nation's greatest military honor. General Clark, the conqueror

²⁸⁴ The date of Furman's death varies between 31 May and 1 June among sources. According to his Medal of Honor citation and press release (both written long after the Battle of Lanuvio), Furman's actions occurred at 09:30 on 31 May 1944. As a result, numerous newspapers used and perpetrated the 31 May date. Even today, many Web sites and other sources list 31 May as Furman's date of death. However, the 34th Division's casualty report lists Furman as KIA on 1 June. Newspapers that used this source to announce Furman's death listed this day. In addition, the *135th Infantry Regiment History* marks Lopez and Houser (the wounded men that Furman saved) as WIA on 1 June. Leighton McKeithen, who learned of Furman's death soon after it occurred, is almost certain that he died on 1 June. Regardless of the exact date, the Battle of Lanuvio saw the deaths of many men over four days on similar terrain prior to the takeover of Rome.

of Rome, approved a higher medal to a private than he had ever received himself. This selfless deed was hardly the work of an egotistical maniac.

Along with criticism from scholars, many former soldiers have varying opinions about the Fifth Army commander. Many cite his reckless use of troops for his own glory as reasons for their anger. However, Red Bull veteran John Minotti commented that all leaders in war are in a difficult position. “Here’s my opinion on generals, colonels, and majors,” remarked the Italian-American Red Bull. “They lose touch with the common soldier, but they have a dirty job, and they have to do it. You take Eisenhower (a highly acclaimed general) at Normandy. He led a bunch of his men to slaughter, and he knew it.”²⁸⁵

Despite his critics, General Clark still retains the admiration of some of his former troops. “He was a great soldier and a great all-around general,” praised Colonel Wilkinson in a 2009 interview.²⁸⁶ “I never met anyone that didn’t like him,” echoed Lloyd Hendricks.²⁸⁷ Furman’s case would further support the compassion the Fifth Army commander had for his soldiers. While some may consider General Clark’s approval to be a fairly novel act, his decision had a monumental effect on Furman’s family back home. With one signature, General Clark made Furman into a legend.

²⁸⁵ John Minotti, personal interview, 16 July 2009.

²⁸⁶ Richard Wilkinson, phone interview, 4 June 2009.

²⁸⁷ Lloyd Hendricks, personal interview, 8 June 2009.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRIBUTES TO A HERO, 1945-1948

Furman's military service had been excruciating to his loved ones back home. For months, they anxiously awaited the arrival of his letters, as each one would bring a short relief with proof that he was still alive. After May 24, however, Furman wrote no more. In his last letter, he told his brother that he was in combat, but urged Homer to hide that from their mother.²⁸⁸ His attempt to shield his mother from worry would not prevent . Just eight days later, he would heroically give his life outside the gates of Rome. On June 28, his loved ones received word that their soldier would not be coming home.²⁸⁹ As he had predicted, his voyage across the Atlantic had been a one-way trip. His fiancé perhaps took his loss as hard as anyone. When Aleen found out that her husband-to-be would not be returning, she shut herself in her room and wanted to give up on life.²⁹⁰ The typically outgoing girl became an emotional wreck and refused to see any friends as she was unable to accept Furman's loss. Only 15, her once bright future had been forever crippled by Furman's death.

²⁸⁸ Furman Smith, "Letter to Homer Smith," 24 May 1944, copy obtained from Nancy McJunkin, Taylor Family Archives: Central, S.C. (these documents are in personal possession of the author).

²⁸⁹ Information comes from an unknown newspaper clipping, 29 June 1944, Taylor Family Archives.

²⁹⁰ Alice Callahan, phone interview, 15 December 2008.



Aleen and Furman's last photograph together, 1943

Equally painful for Charlie and Oley had to be the lack of information they had about his death. They knew their beloved son was dead, but they had few details as to what had happened. They did not know if he had died painfully, tired, cold, hungry, or alone. They did not know who or what had killed him, so there could be no target for their anger. They had no body and thus they had no opportunity for closure. For months, Furman's family could only grieve with questions in their minds and empty feelings in their hearts.

However, in January 1945, they received the stunning news that Furman was going to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. Aside from the great honor

attributed to the nation's highest military award, the details about Furman's stand had to greatly assist in bringing an end to the family's suffering. For the first time, they knew Furman did not have a prolonged, painful death. He had not sacrificed his life needlessly. He had gone beyond the call of duty and bravely gave his life so that two of his comrades could return to their loved ones. He was forever gone from his small beloved world on Six Mile Creek, but because of his glorious stand, his story would echo for generations.

On January 17, 1945, a small ceremony in front of the Smiths' rustic farmhouse took place. Furman's family along with a few neighbors attended. General J. H. Hester presided over the brief service. Despite the award's prestige, the sparsely attended ceremony was just as Furman was—humble. Furthermore, the Smiths shed no tears for Furman that day; they had spent months grieving over his death. Instead, the family stood strong and proud for their lost soldier. Journalist Harlan Edwards, described the scene:

Erect and firm for a man of his years, Mr. Smith stood with his eyes looking out across the red cotton fields his son had known so well, as the general hung the ribbon about his neck. And as it hung there the medal caught the rays of the dying sun and reflected brilliant slivers of light as though attempting to capture for itself some of the dazzling beauty of the spirit of the man who had died so valiantly to earn it.²⁹¹

²⁹¹ Harlan Edwards, "Highest Award to Norris Hero," *Anderson Independent*, 18 January 1944.



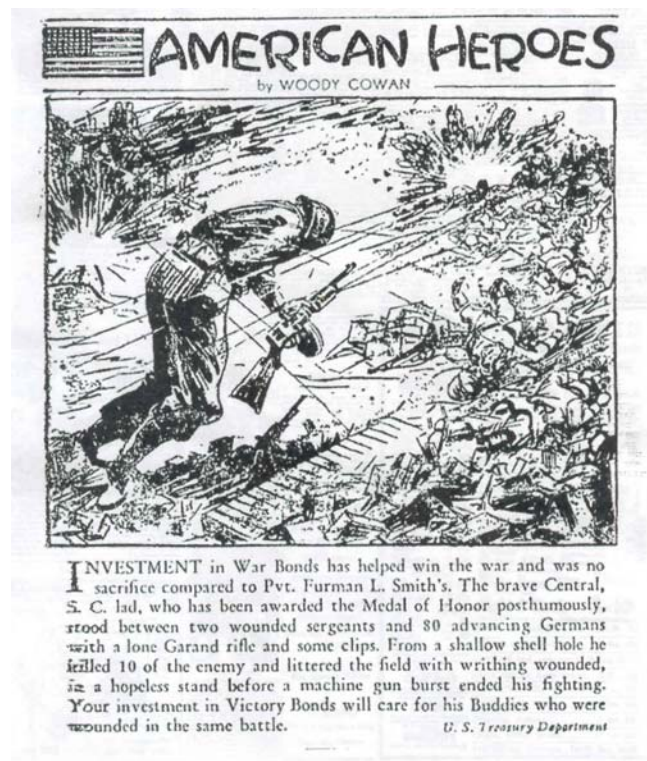
Charlie proudly accepts Furman's Medal of Honor, January 17, 1945

Furman's award quickly inspired articles about him in South Carolina's statewide papers, *The Greenville News* and *The State*. He became the Palmetto State's first Medal of Honor winner in World War II and Pickens County's first winner ever. Before the end of the war, his former 34th Division began printing its own newspaper, *The Red Bulletin*. In the inaugural issue, Furman's Medal of Honor was the top story.²⁹² He was the ninth

²⁹² "9th Medal of Honor Won by 34th," *The Red Bulletin*, 17 March 1945, available online, <http://www.34thinfantry.com/publications/publications.htm>

Red Bull to win the award. Today the Red Bulls boast 20 Medal of Honor winners, the most of any division.²⁹³

The United States government even used Furman's story to boost the sale of victory bonds. An issue of *The Sikeston (Missouri) Herald* featured a description of Furman's actions and accompanied the story with a drawing of his heroic stand. After a description of his actions at Lanuvio, the advertisement urged readers that "investment in Victory Bonds will care for his buddies who were wounded in the same battle."²⁹⁴



Victory Bond Advertisement, 1945²⁹⁵

The day after Charlie received Furman's Medal of Honor, his parents also learned that a firing range in Italy was dedicated to him. Located in Northern Italy near Udine,

²⁹³ Russ Bierl, personal interview, 15 July 2009.

²⁹⁴ "American Heroes." *The Sikeston (Mo.) Herald*. 13 September 1945, page 8.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

the Smith Range became a regimental training site for small arms and machine gun firing. The dedication scrolls from the range praised Furman's "indomitable fighting spirit."²⁹⁶ Captain Mitchell Allen, who was a real estate officer in Furman's battalion, gave the dedication scrolls to Furman's parents.²⁹⁷ Yet there were more honors awaiting South Carolina's first World War II Medal of Honor winner.

Sometime after Furman's Medal of Honor ceremony, the government dedicated the road he had grown up on. Until that time, it had barely been more than a dirt trail, but it was graded, asphalted, and then named Furman L. Smith Memorial Highway. Oddly enough, the dedication of the highway had been one of Furman's last wishes. During his last furlough at home, Furman and brother-in-law Ed McCall were riding in Ed's old Plymouth—possibly to visit Aleen. It was a rainy day, and the downpour had left the road muddy and difficult to navigate. The car became stuck in the mud, and they were unable to pull out the old Plymouth. The defeated young men abandoned the car and walked back home in the rain and mud. Much like Furman's farewell party at the swimming hole, rain had ruined the outing. On the way back, Furman said, "I wish to the Lord that when I get home there'd be a highway here."²⁹⁸

Furman L. Smith Memorial Highway became a distinctive feature in Six Mile, as its pavement set it apart from many dirt roads in the community. Only Six Mile's main street was a paved road at the time. Yet this dedication was a small compensation for the soldier who had sacrificed so much for his country, and it would not be the only road to

²⁹⁶ "Scroll From Range In Italy Goes to Late Medal Winner's Parents," *Greenville News*, 18 January 1945.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Leonard "Shorty" Merck, phone interview, 7 March 2009.

be named after Furman. At Fort Jackson, where he first entered the service, Furman Smith Street was named in his honor. Both roads are still in use today.

Furman's Funeral, August 22, 1948

Four years after his death, Furman's body was returned to the States. For the heroic soldier, Six Mile hosted a grand military funeral. The event would dwarf his Medal of Honor ceremony from three years earlier. The discrepancy of fanfare between the two was understandable. When Furman first received his award, Germany and Japan had not yet surrendered. But by 1948, America had emerged as a superpower after victory in the war. Furman's funeral would pay homage to a humble hometown boy who walked off his farm and answered the call of duty, becoming one of America's elite fighting men from the world's greatest war.

An enormous crowd for the small town of Six Mile attended. Over a hundred cars lined the road as the community paid respect to their fallen hero.²⁹⁹ Although Furman had been a church member of King's Grove, the Smith family graveyard had long been associated with Pleasant Hill, so it hosted the ceremonies. The country church was too small to seat everyone, and a large crowd waited outside while the service continued. After the service, Furman's funeral procession continued to his gravesite accompanied by a grand military parade.

Furman's honesty and humor had endeared him to the entire community. His comrades in the military held equally fond memories of the farmboy. Leighton

²⁹⁹ Information comes from photographs in the Taylor Family Archives.

McKeithen recalled one occasion during basic training when a brass band performed for the soldiers. Upon hearing the band, Furman candidly asked McKeithen, “How can they get music out of all them little pipes and curlicues and horns?”³⁰⁰ The naïve comment stuck many of his soldier-friends by surprised, and they shared a laugh over Furman’s lack of experiences. For this farmboy, who once marveled at his first glimpse of a brass instrument, it is fitting that the Army dispatched a 15-man band to honor him at his funeral.³⁰¹



Furman’s funeral in Six Mile, 1948

Following the band, an honor guard with seven soldiers, all with M1s, marched past the attentive crowd. Behind them were Furman’s preacher Roy Murphree and another assistant. Both pastors looked mournful as they cast their eyes close to the ground directly in front of them while they approached the gravesite. Furman had asked Leighton McKeithen, Furman’s comrade in basic training, to conduct the ceremony, but he was still studying to become a minister and was unable to attend.

³⁰⁰ Leighton McKeithen, “Letter to Myra Taylor,” 17 October 1988, Taylor Family Archives.

³⁰¹ This information comes from two photographs from Furman’s funeral in the Taylor Family Archives.

After the preachers came Furman's casket, carried by eight more members of the armed forces. Childhood friend and fellow Red Bull Lloyd Hendricks was one of the pallbearers. He had shared Furman's military experience almost entirely. They both had spent basic training at Fort McClellan, and afterwards, became Red Bulls at Anzio. Three days prior to Furman's stand at Lanuvio, Lloyd had been wounded in action. Shrapnel from a German 88 antitank gun struck him in the lower left leg. He would serve out the rest of the war in West Virginia. News of Lloyd's injury reached Six Mile four days after Charlie and Oley received the word about Furman's death.³⁰² "I wanted to see Rome," said Lloyd, but neither he nor Furman ever walked through the eternal city.³⁰³

As Lloyd and the other soldiers carried Furman's casket down the street, the people of Six Mile paid their respects to their fallen soldier. Not a man in attendance was without a tie; no lady was without her finest dress. Even children appeared to be reverent as Furman's casket went by.

Behind Furman walked the family that he had left behind. Charlie and Oley were first, standing beside one another. Together, they would deal with this tragedy the way they had dealt with so many others throughout their lives. Following Furman's parents were his five sisters. Essie Mae was accompanied by her husband Ed McCall, while Ethel walked with her husband Charles Taylor, another World War II veteran. Homer, whom Furman had written his last letter, walked along side his wife Eleanor and their daughter Norma. Next came Furman's youngest sisters Ellen, Hester, and Martha.

³⁰² Information comes from an unknown newspaper clipping, 2 July 1944, Taylor Family Archives.

³⁰³ Lloyd Hendricks, personal interview, 8 June 2009.



Rev. Murphree (the younger pastor, front center), Lloyd Hendricks (the tallest pallbearer in the back), and Furman's family (following behind the casket) in the procession.

Not among them was the youngest brother Mit, who had shared so many hours in the fields with Furman. Tragically, Mit had died of pneumonia in December 1945. The two brothers had been close. Born only two years apart, the farming duo had dropped out of school together to take care of their family. Mit had been present when Charlie received Furman's Medal of Honor three years ago, but would die before Furman's body returned to the states. Sadly, both brothers failed to reach their 20th birthday, and they were buried within three years of each other. In spirit, they were together again.

The ceremony finally brought closure to the Smith family. Charlie suddenly found himself as the only man in a household with his three youngest daughters, but he had been in a similar situation before. When his father Oliver died, Charlie had assumed responsibility for his younger brothers and sisters. Now that his sons Furman and Mit

were gone, the 65-year-old Charlie again became the caretaker of the Smith clan. With his patience and compassion, he was the perfect man to raise a family of girls. Charlie, Oley, and their daughters sat somberly as they laid Furman to rest.

Among the most solemn of people was Furman's fiancé Aleen Rampey. Aleen had meant so much to Furman, as did Furman to Aleen. The couple's engagement had given Furman the composure to fight in the war. Without her vow of marriage, Furman likely would have never become the soldier that he was. Yet due to his bravery, he never made it home to fulfill his promise of marriage.

As Furman's flag was presented to his mother, most of the attendees stood silently in respect to Furman, but stared without emotion as the proceedings continued. Aleen, however, was not a casual observer. In a photograph, one can see her leaning forward, unwilling to miss a moment of the final honors to her late fiancé. Aleen, an only child who lived a community away in Cateechee mill village, had lost her first love. The Smiths had each other to remember Furman, but after this day, the young Aleen would have to grieve alone.



Oley receiving Furman's flag, Aleen on the far right

Aleen would attempt to move on with her life and get married, but her life appeared to be forever marred with tragedy. While pregnant with her third child, her doctors informed her that she had a heart condition and advised her not to have the baby. Unwilling to sacrifice the life of her daughter, Aleen chose to proceed with her childbirth. The young mother did not inform her parents about her risk, as she did not want them to worry about her safety. Sadly, her heart was not as strong as it was brave, and she died in childbirth. Aleen was only 27. In a cruel turn of events, her baby also died shortly afterwards.³⁰⁴

³⁰⁴ Alice Callahan, personal interview, 16 March 2009.

Furman and Aleen

Some might consider Furman's story a tragic one, which in a young man so full of virtue was robbed of the opportunity of fulfilling a life that had so much promise. However, in comparison to his fiancé's story—Furman's fate appears almost desirable. Although the young couple shared many virtues, their lives would have drastically different outcomes.

Both Furman and Aleen were noble individuals. Aleen attempted to shield her parents from worry by not telling them about her life-threatening condition, as Furman never revealed the true danger of Anzio to his family. Both were also brave. Aleen was willing to risk her life to save her baby, just as Furman was willing to risk his to save his comrades. Both paid the ultimate price for their courage.

However, Furman's attempt successfully saved the lives of two men, whereas Aleen's baby died soon after childbirth. Furman's comrades became a living testimony to his gallantry, but Aleen's dead baby could never tell the story of its mother. Credit for Furman's heroic action has lived on for generations, immortalized by his Congressional Medal of Honor. Yet Aleen received no praise, no honor. Despite her virtues, she left no legacy. In a deplorable ending, Aleen died without acknowledgement and even lost the very life she attempted to save.

Even today, one can go to Furman's grave at Pleasant Hill Baptist Church and view a large tombstone with neat gravel in front of it. Usually flowers or American flags decorate the grave, continuously paying tribute to the fallen soldier who gave his life for

his country. Buried along with Furman are his parents and his brother Mit. Even his great grandfather Reuben Smith, who first began the Smith legacy on Six Mile Creek is in the same graveyard. Although he died miles away from his beloved farm, Furman's body rests at home and is surrounded eternally by his family.

Yet no such honors are bestowed on Aleen. The body of the young mother lies in an unmarked grave at Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church in Oconee County along with the infant whose life she futilely tried to save. No other members of her family are buried with her. She remains just as she felt when she first learned of Furman's death—alone.

Red Bulls Forever

The man who served as Furman's living legacy would never forget his heroic deed. Staff Sergeant David Lopez vowed to name his first child after the young soldier who had saved his life. This promise created a bit of a problem when his first-born was a girl. However, Lopez remained true to his word and created a feminized version of Furman, "Fern," to pay homage to his fallen comrade.³⁰⁵

Lopez would not stop there. Every Christmas and Mother's Day, Lopez would send Furman's mother flowers and a card. This lasted until Oley's death in 1973. He continued contact with Furman's family into the 1990s, even after suffering a stroke. However, the Chicago native never made a trip to South Carolina to visit Furman's family. A comrade once asked Lopez why he never visited Furman's mother personally. "I was afraid she wouldn't like me very much," he replied. Although he never went to

³⁰⁵ Myra Taylor, phone interview, 27 November 2008.

South Carolina, when he was shown pictures of Furman's grave, he broke into tears and had to leave the room.³⁰⁶

Leighton McKeithen felt that visiting Furman's family would only remind them of their loss. However, he did visit Furman's grave numerous times. On these visits, he would sit on his former comrade's tombstone and weep.³⁰⁷ Despite the overwhelming emotions a visit brings, Leighton said in a 2008 interview, "I want to visit Furman just one more time before I answer that final roll call."³⁰⁸

One evening while looking over one of his Anzio books, Leighton gently placed his reading down as a tear started to roll down his cheek. Caught off guard by his reaction, his wife Edna asked him what was wrong. The former soldier turned pastor sat silently for a few moments before responding to his devoted wife. Thinking of Furman and other lost comrades, the aging Red Bull pointed a finger to the sky and said, "We're going to have a grand reunion when we next meet up there."³⁰⁹

³⁰⁶ William C. Williams, "Letter to Myra Taylor," 28 June 1990, copy obtained from Myra Taylor, Taylor Family Archives.

³⁰⁷ McKeithen, phone interview, 30 December 2008.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Edna McKeithen, phone interview, 2 June 2009.

CHAPTER FIVE

EPILOGUE, 1946-2009

To his family, Furman's stand had an incredible and almost instantaneous impact. The very day General Hester presented Furman's Medal of Honor to his father Charlie, the commander sensed the significance of the event. Despite the humble ceremony in front of the Smiths' rustic farmhouse, the general proclaimed that Furman had given them a special gift and noted that the Smiths' had something that would "be handed down from generation to generation."³¹⁰ However, Furman's gift would go beyond the pretty medallion attached to light blue ribbon that they received that day, and General Hester likely knew this as well. The late 19-year-old Furman had created a legacy for the Smith family.

Furman left more than the memories of a loyal son and the pride of a brave soldier. Even in death, he delivered a tangible gift to his loved ones. For the loss of their son, the government gave Furman's grief-stricken parents a pension. With a decent amount of capital, Charlie asked his father-in-law how much he wanted for the 57-acre farm. The asking price was 2,500 dollars. In response, Furman's mother Oley pooled all the couple's cash in her apron and carried it to the edge of their field. Together, the elderly couple sat down and counted the money their lost son had given them. They had enough. Because of Furman, the Smiths were landowners again after more than a decade of renting. "We did what Furman would have wanted with the money," said his oldest

³¹⁰ Harlan Edwards.

sister Essie Mae. “We bought a farm.”³¹¹ As his great grandfather Reuben had done 60 years earlier, Furman provided the Smith family with a farm on Six Mile Creek.

Every month, Oley also received a check from the government for 75 dollars until her death in 1973.³¹² This was a great sum of money when compared with Charlie’s previous wages. When he worked in a sawmill years earlier, he would earn 50 cents for a 10-hour day.³¹³ Because of Furman, his parents were assured a monthly check that used to take Charlie nearly half a year to earn.

With this financial stability, all three of Furman’s younger sisters graduated from high school, a level of education he was denied. They eventually married and took higher paying jobs in mills after the war. Future generations of the Smiths continued to build on their progress. While Furman’s siblings had worked in mills, a few of their children started their own businesses. Two of Furman’s nephews had the opportunity to attend college, one from a church’s academic scholarship and another on a football scholarship. This resulted in the Smith family’s first associate’s degree in 1967. Two other nephews, adhering to the family’s pious nature, became preachers. The second generation after Furman was even more fortunate. Among this generation of the Smith clan, all graduated high school and higher education became common, not exceptional. A third generation after Furman is growing up much more privileged than Furman’s humble, agrarian childhood.

³¹¹ Essie Mae McCall, quoted by Jim Clark, 1.

³¹² Eleanor Smith, personal interview, 3 June 2009.

³¹³ Wilton Stephens, personal interview, 1 January 2009.

Ironically, soon after the Smiths acquired the family farm, they stopped farming for their livelihood. Even Furman's younger brother Mit, his closest partner on the family farm, had moved away from farming prior to his premature death in 1945. In the months prior to his death, Mit had been working at Judson Mill in Greenville. The trek required him to walk two miles to catch a bus in Six Mile, then he would ride the 30 miles to the mill. The trip alone was a chore, but the guaranteed wages offered by the mill had been too good to pass up.

Thus, one may wonder if Furman had survived the war whether he would have continued to farm or whether he and Aleen would have moved to a city and taken jobs in the mills as his other siblings did. "I doubt Furman would have ever left the farm," remarked Edward Jewell. Perhaps in his heart this would be true, but Furman would likely have had to yield to the changing face of Pickens County.

The Smiths were not the only Six Mile family to quit farming. With the influx of new industries, many former farmers in the area discovered that they could work wage jobs during the day and still have time to return to their fields in the evening.³¹⁴ With more avenues for steady income and other factors such as the G.I. Bill, education gradually became more accessible and sought after by Six Mile residents. Farming in the Six Mile area became a supplemental income after World War II and gradually its financial importance faded. After World War II, the poor, uneducated farming community that Furman knew quickly changed. The spacious family farms have been divided into plots for mobile homes and vinyl siding houses. It has been decades since

³¹⁴ Leroy Stewart, personal interview, 29 January 2009.

farmers plowed the cotton fields which once dominated the landscape. Many of the changes to his world would have shocked Furman. Even Roy Murphree, his pastor and spiritual mentor, created great controversy after he entered an adulterous relationship.

However, Six Mile today would not be completely foreign to Furman. Despite the influx of industry, higher incomes, and greater education, Six Mile retains its aspect as a one-street town. John Wade, mayor of Six Mile, claims that main street Six Mile remains similar to the way it was nearly 100 years ago.³¹⁵ Its street is still void of a stop light. Some of the fighting mentality that he possessed must still be present, as Pickens County now boasts four Medal of Honor winners, the highest number per capita of any county in the country. William A. McWorther earned one for his actions in the Pacific during World War II. Charles H. Baker earned another during the Korean War. James D. Howe won the last Medal of Honor from Pickens County during the Vietnam War. All four men were killed in action and received the award posthumously. Smith, Baker, and Howe were from Six Mile, one of the smallest towns in the county.

Honors are still bestowed on Furman, the Medal of Honor winner. In 2004, the South Carolina congress passed a resolution (Bill 5282) to commend him for his valor.³¹⁶ President George W. Bush gave a short commencement speech during the 2008 graduation at Furman University in Greenville (the university's name has no connection to Furman Smith). In the speech, he paid tribute to a number of notable South Carolina figures, but Furman was the only one he called by name. "Sixty four years ago to this

³¹⁵ John Wade, quoted by Julie Howle, "Six Mile: Small Town in a Panoramic Setting," *A Guide to Pickens County*, 2008, *The Greenville News*, 15-16.

³¹⁶ "2003-2004 Bill 5282," South Carolina Legislature Online, Available online: http://www.scstatehouse.gov/sess115_2003-2004/bills/5282.htm

very day,” President Bush addressed the recent graduates. “that young man carried the Furman name into history. And now, in a very different way, so will each of you.”³¹⁷

Above all the honors and dedications bestowed upon him for winning the Medal of Honor, he is remembered for the great human being that he was. “Furman turned into everybody’s hero after they saw the medals he earned... but he was all of us kid’s hero *before* he went in the service,” noted Edward Jewell.³¹⁸ Memories of Furman’s life still evoke the strongest emotions to anyone who met him and even to some who were born too late to know him. Many still speak of Furman as if he was a man they had talked to yesterday. Sixty-five years after his death, few can recall his stories without laughter or tears.

For 18 years, Furman lived a modest life as a farmboy isolated in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. He never wore the Medal of Honor around his neck; he died never knowing that had become a hero. Yet in his valiant stand at Lanuvio, he created a legend for his community and a tangible heritage for his loved ones. The fields of cotton and corn from his world are gone forever, but all 57 acres of the former Smith farm remain in the family’s possession. Now 25 people from nine households live on the plot of land that Furman once worked. Because of his legacy, his great great nieces and nephews are able to swim in the same waters of Six Mile Creek that he did decades ago.

³¹⁷ John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project*, available online: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=77459>.

³¹⁸ Maj. Edward Jewell, Phone Interview, 30 May 2009.

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